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ABSTRACT

This guide explores ways that schools can put the idea of integrating educational and community support for dropout prevention to work in the school and community. Part 1, "Implementing a Plan for Restructuring the School," recommends the formation of a task force to involve the community and school staff from the start. It also describes the integrated learning environment (ILE) that is at the heart of the effective plan of action. Part 2, "Generating Strategies To Create an Integrated Learning Environment," suggests strategies that schools can adopt or adapt to implement their notions of the ILE within their schools. Both schoolwide and classroom-based interventions are discussed and illustrated. Schools may tailor these interventions to their local conditions. Four chapters in this part explore ways that schools can manipulate school-level factors related to dropping out--reducing truancy, providing alternative school schedules, examining school policies that affect retention, and improving school climate. The rest of part 2 focuses on the events in the classroom that are indicative of an ILE. They include increasing educational relevance, changing teacher roles, creating a career-focused curriculum, providing for success, and monitoring progress. A list of 236 references concludes the guide. (YLB)

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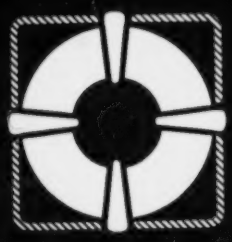

DROPOUT PREVENTION SERIES

A Guide for Dropout Prevention:
Creating an Integrated Learning Environment in Secondary Schools

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A GUIDE FOR DROPOUT PREVENTION

CREATING AN INTEGRATED LEARNING ENVIRONMENT IN SECONDARY SCHOOLS

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Hail to the cultured mind!
Contending for the World's command,
Here let them be combined."

--Inscription over entrance to the
first manual training school in the
United States: St. Louis Manual Training
School of Washington University

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FOREWORD

The number of young people leaving secondary school before graduation is staggering. Estimates of about one million dropouts per year carry implications of great personal loss. Costs to society in terms of lost opportunity for employment and increased burdens on state and national welfare systems are great.

The school's role in the dropout problem is complex and multifaceted. Families and other agencies also share a responsibility in helping youth complete high school. All must examine the pushes and pulls that move students in an effort to find ways to hold them on a constructive course.

The National Center's project on dropout prevention seeks to provide a connection between research and practice in the critical area of retention of potential dropouts. To move toward the goal of increasing the holding power of schools, the National Center has developed a package of materials to help educators plan expanded school programs that will act as a magnet in retaining students through high school graduation. Some of the elements with magnetic attraction are characteristics of vocational education, such as experiential learning and a work orientation, which can be strengthened in vocational programs and expanded into other aspects of schooling.

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Ray D. Ryan
Executive Director
The National Center for Research
in Vocational Education

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Educators have become increasingly alarmed at the dropout rate, now approaching 30 percent. The wasted human potential this represents is of tragic proportions. Secondary schools, responding to the call from the nation for both equity and excellence, have developed innovative strategies that maintain standards and retain students.

Vocational educators have had a special role in formulating and implementing these strategies. Vocationally inspired strategies employ a career-focused curriculum, experiential and cooperative learning experiences, and participative teacher-student interaction. These strategies change the atmosphere and conduct of the classroom, so that it becomes a more attractive place for students, especially for at-risk students.

Other strategies more directly affect the atmosphere and conduct of the school as a whole, whether it be a vocational-technical center or a comprehensive high school. These strategies are aimed at making the school more responsive to student needs and more supportive of student circumstances. They include attendance improvement, flexible scheduling, changes in policy to encourage school continuance, and general improvement of the school climate. These strategies apply just as well to special programs for a targeted group of students or secondary schools in general.

Evidence of the effectiveness of these classroom-based and school-based interventions has been gathered by The National Center for Research in Vocational Education and combined with research on the dropout problem. Careful and systematic content analysis of program materials from educators across the country uncovered the salience of these interventions. A relatively comprehensive review of the research literature suggested a conceptual framework that identifies the variables being manipulated in those interventions and, therefore, explains the effectiveness of the interventions.

This conceptual framework was intimated by a recurrent theme in the research literature and program materials. The theme was expressed in many ways (e.g., collaboration, linkage, bonding, coordination, articulation) but an essential message emerged from the apparent chaos. The message, the thrust of all these dropout prevention efforts: in order to reduce the dropout rate, change agents must increase the frequency and quality of interactions among all people involved in the school system and expand the scope of people involved. This guide explores strategies that schools (or programs) can use to put this notion into practice. The environment that is created when actors in it are made more highly interactive is referred to in this guide as an integrated learning environment.

<u>A Guide for Dropout Prevention</u> is organized around two topics:

- Implementing a plan for restructuring the school
- Generating strategies to create an integrated learning environment

The first part on implementation presents the conceptual framework of an integrated learning environment that ties together all of the strategies discussed in the second part. It also gives an overview of a strategic planning process for dropout prevention. The second part details effective strategies from which change agents can choose to tailor a dropout prevention plan to their own school or district.

The guide is not intended to be read from cover to cover. Change agents should understand the concept of the integrated learning environment and know the strategic planning process explained in Part 1 of the guide. Part 2 should be read selectively, according to the strategies that will be incorporated in the local dropout prevention plan.

PART 1

IMPLEMENTING A PLAN FOR RESTRUCTURING THE SCHOOL

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

From a historical perspective, schools have been doing an excellent job. The number of young people graduating from high school has been steadily and dramatically rising since the 1930s. Schools have been able to respond effectively to the demands for a more skilled labor force; schools have been able to meet the needs of newly arrived immigrants; and schools have helped prepare people for a more scientifically advanced and technologically sophisticated society. However, today, the schools face a new challenge--one of graduating an even larger proportion of students, all of whom need certain "core competencies" to be productive in our society.

Dropping out is such a serious problem now because of the limited labor market opportunities that exist for young people. In the late 1800s and early 1900s, the rise of industrialism decreased the demand for agricultural labor. The influx of immigrants and the increases in machine efficiency caused a decline in the industrial demand for child labor. Consequently, larger numbers of young people became unemployed. Sheradden (1986) states:

> From WWI to the present, young people were increasingly separated from the economy. By the 1970's, young people were, from an economic point of view, more marginal than ever before. (p. 21)

In the 1980s demand for youth labor is declining in all manufacturing industries and in nearly every service industry except retail trade. Young people, despite their decreased numbers in the population, are becoming even more economically irrelevant.

The lack of productive roles for young people to assume in our economy disengages and alienates them from society. The disengagement and alienation is manifested in many ways--and the headlines and the cover stories of news magazines suggest some of the ways. The litany of problems besetting our youth today has led observers to speak of the "multiple problem syndrome of youth."

Dropping out of school is merely a part of the larger pattern of dropping out of society. Here are some of the other symptoms (Sechler and Crowe 1987):

- Dropouts are 6 to 10 times more likely to be involved in criminal acts than their in-school peers.
- Dropouts are more likely to be illegal drug users. In one urban study, 26 percent of the students who did not use drugs dropped out of school, but 30 percent of those who used drugs casually and 51 percent of those who used drugs at least once a week dropped out.
- Dropouts are far more likely to be unemployed than high school graduates.
- Dropouts lag behind their graduated peers in cognitive development.
- Dropouts suffer emotional consequences, too. A 1980 study found that half the dropouts and dropout prone in a middle class suburb seriously considered suicide; nearly one-third attempted it.

These adverse conditions, in addition to pregnancy and limited English proficiency, contribute to students' feelings of alienation and resignation.

Schools are not prepared to intervene in all of these problems. Nor should they be held solely responsible for the problems of our youth. All members and institutions of the community are equally responsible and have an important role to play in helping young adults cope with the demands of modern life and contribute actively to the advancement of society.

Thus, to respond adequately to the dropout problem, change agents must form close networks with each other. That is the essential message of this guide. The guide is grounded in this idea: for schools to increase their ability to help young people stay and succeed in school, they must increase the number and improve the quality of linkages and relationships both within the school and out in the community.

This guide explores ways that schools can put this idea--the integration of educational and community support for dropout prevention--to work in the school and community. In Part I, the guide recommends the formation of a task force to involve the community and school staff from the start. It also describes the integrated learning environment (ILE) that is at the heart of the effective plan of action.

Part II of the guide suggests strategies that schools can adopt or adapt to implement their notion of the ILE within their schools. Both schoolwide and classroom-based interventions are discussed and illustrated. Schools can tailor these interventions to their local conditions. It is hoped that discussion of these strategies will help change agents brainstorm new and better ways for people and institutions to work together to address the dropout problem in their community.

CHAPTER 2

AN OVERVIEW OF STRATEGIC PLANNING FOR INCREASING SCHOOL RETENTION

Strategic planning for an effective dropout prevention program involves the following series of activities: (1) forming a task force, (2) defining the problem, (3) setting goals, (4) generating strategies to attain those goals, and (5) selecting and implementing the best strategies. This chapter reviews each of these activities to give the reader an overview of the planning process--the tool that will be used to create the integrated learning environment your at-risk students need to stay and succeed in school.

Forming a Dropout Prevention Task Force

Any dropout prevention effort needs total community involvement to succeed. As a first activity, school administrators should form a task force composed of concerned business leaders, members of social service agencies, community leaders, and interested teachers and administrators.

The task force serves as a fruitful link between the school and community to promote dropout prevention efforts, provide effective approaches for implementing the program, and seek out funding and other resources for program activities. It also builds commitment for the program in both the school and community. Thus, through their representatives on the task force, a dropout prevention effort becomes a collaborative venture among parents, teachers, administrators, business leaders, representatives from social service agencies, faculty of middle schools as well as postsecondary institutions, members of the school board, agents of the legal system, and labor representatives.

Usually, a task force consists of 9-12 members. This number ensures a representative cross-section of the community and an effective group process.

The dropout prevention task force has many responsibilities, of which planning the program is only one. Since it includes those administrators and school professionals who will actually implement the plan, the task force goes beyond a mere advisory role to act as the program's policymaking body.

Defining the Problem

Once the task force has been formed, the next task in the planning process is to define the scope and character of the dropout problem in the school and community. This problem involves a complex web of social, economic, and psychological forces. As discussed in Chapter One, dropouts are not only out of school, they are out of work and on the streets. For many of them, their alienation also manifests as drug abuse, welfare dependency, delinquency and criminality, premature parenting, and cultural impoverishment.

Given this broad context, the task force should begin its work by defining the dropout problem more locally. Task force members must assess the characteristics of

local students who drop out, the school-related factors of the dropout problem, and the consequences of dropping out in the community.

Because so many aspects of dropout behavior cannot be addressed directly through other institutions, task force members should probably focus on the features of the local dropout problem that are most immediately relevant to the school environment. These features include the following:

- o Absenteeism and truancy
- o Demands placed on at-risk students by work and family that interfere with school
- o The impact of grade retention, higher graduation requirements, and suspension on the local dropout problem
- o Discipline and behavior difficulties and issues of school safety
- o Low self-esteem and its associated effects among at-risk students on a local basis
- o Basic skills deficiencies and the availability of vocational education services to students
- o The expectations held by involved others for students

The task force should attempt to obtain accurate measurements of these local features, but if complete information cannot easily be obtained, this should not be allowed to delay further action. Once enough information is at hand to impart a sense of direction to the effort, the task force should focus its energy on acting to solve the problem.

Setting Program Goals

With the problem now defined, the task force needs to decide on what outcomes the program should achieve. Setting goals will give the task force focus, help the members understand the necessary scope of their work, and help them assess the effectiveness of their efforts.

It is important to set realistic goals. These goals should address not only the work of reducing the dropout rate, but also of decreasing vandalism, improving scores on reading and math achievement tests, improving average daily attendance (ADA), and increasing vocational education enrollments. The setting of other goals will depend on the particular problems besetting the school or school system. For example, if drug abuse is a major problem, then the task force may want to set a goal of increased referrals of drug-using students to substance abuse clinics in the community. The discrepancy between the stated goals and the present reality constitutes a precise statement of the problem.

Generating Possible Strategies

Now that the task force members know where they want the program to go, they must begin to think about what they can do to get it there. Brainstorming ideas is an appropriate next step.

To help generate strategies, task force members may want to confer with experts on dropout prevention, attend relevant workshops, read materials on the issue, contact schools that use innovative dropout prevention approaches, solicit state-level officials for technical assistance, and draw upon their own common sense, creativity, and experience. In addition, Part II of this guidebook offers a wealth of information and ideas.

When brainstorming potential strategies, the task force should keep in mind the features of the school environment that appear either to exacerbate or ameliorate the local dropout problem. The members should try to match strategies to specific needs. For example, if the task force finds that students with high levels of absenteeism are very likely to drop out of school, then the task force should look for strategies that will ensure better monitoring and improvement of attendance.

Every school-related element of the dropout problem should result in a list of corresponding strategies to alleviate it. (The task force should generate ideas to address as many nonschool-related elements as possible, too, as the community may be able to offer relevant support services that could become collaborative program activities.) An effective group process will generate a large number of strategies.

Selecting and Implementing Strategies

Strategy Selection

The task force now has before it a "laundry list" of strategies from which to select. Selection criteria should include the following considerations:

- The nature of the school system's at-risk population and its relative hetero- or homogeneity
- The degree to which efforts must be systemwide, given the magnitude of the problem and the size of the school or school district
- The resources available
- The acceptability of the effort to the school and community
- The degree of flexibility in the present delivery system and staff's tolerance for change
- The perception that there is a problem and the perceived ability to address it

The nature of the at-risk population. The nature of the school system's at-risk population and its relative heterogeneity or homogeneity are critical considerations when selecting program strategies. A heterogeneous at-risk population will require a

variety of strategies; a homogeneous population may respond well to a more focused treatment.

For example, a local at-risk population may consist of a large number of pregnant teens or teen parents as well as another significant group of students with limited English proficiency (LEP). Any effective dropout prevention effort must address the needs of both subpopulations. If these students represent the bulk of the at-risk population, the most efficient approach will be to aim specific strategies primarily at these students.

The degree to which efforts must be systemic. This will vary according to the magnitude of the problem and the size of the school. If one out of every two students will drop out in the school, a program that targets and pulls out a group of at risk-students is probably inappropriate. More interventions at the building level are needed. A dropout prevention strategy that assigns a teacher to be an advocate for an individual at-risk student may be sufficient for a small school; but a large school may require that a more formal case management system be put in place to help at-risk students. When choosing among strategies, the task force should assess whether the strategies are systemic enough, given the nature and extent of the problem.

The availability of resources. Administrators often cite a lack of resources (e.g., money, staff time, districtwide support, community services) as the major reason for not adopting innovations. Central to any dropout prevention effort is the attitude that no school is an island. When considering resources, the task force should take into account the following potential sources of outside help:

- Volunteer services that can be provided by parents and others to do hall monitoring, perform study hall duty, and help teachers maintain discipline in the classroom.

- Community support gathered by the task force, which has leaders from the community.

- Social service agencies, which could be invited to set up an office on the school campus to provide services to the students. Often, their funding source can finance a location in the school (as has been done in the New York City Schools).

- Assistance from business and industry, which can provide training, staff for mentoring, educational materials, cooperative education jobs for students, facilities, and equipment. Businesses have even arranged to guarantee jobs to graduates and distribute gifts to graduates.

- Community colleges and universities, which can reserve places for students in the program who graduate.

- Grants, which are available from many sources. On the federal level, the Congress is expected to pass legislation (H.R. 3042) to provide grants to local educational agencies for dropout prevention demonstration projects. State resources should also be investigated. A number of states (e.g., Florida, Wisconsin) have set up centers to provide technical assistance to dropout prevention efforts. In addition, some state legislatures have appropriated funds to support local programs. Private foundations, such as the Ford Foundation, are yet another funding source.

The task force should not feel limited to tapping the resources of school personnel and operating budgets when formulating a plan of action. Some strategies require little additional resources, yet are quite effective. For example, reorganizing teachers to work in teams is a strategy needing only a willingness to experiment. Nevertheless, adoption of some strategies may be precluded due to budget constraints and lack of out-of-school support.

The acceptability of the effort to the school and community. Acceptability will vary according to how people perceive the effort to be compatible with school and community values and how much ownership of the effort is felt by those who will implement and be affected by the innovation. The task force itself can use its influence to push for acceptance and support of the program from the school and the community. Here are some suggestions of ways to help the program gain acceptance:

- **Involve teachers from the start.** A teacher should be on the task force to provide input. The task force should plan to give a summer orientation on the effort for teachers, make modifications based on teacher feedback, and bolster teachers' ownership of the effort by offering program autonomy.

- **Give students a say, as well.** Student councils and student newspapers should be informed of efforts and results of proceedings. Input from students should be sought through assembly meetings and surveys of student needs and attitudes.

- **Win the support of parents.** The task force can collaborate with a parent-teacher association to provide an orientation night for parents.

- **Gain the aid of media coverage to help the school gather community support.** The media should be asked to present the problem in all of its dimensions and to offer a counterpoint by reporting on the schools' constructive and creative responses to the problem.

The degree of flexibility in the structure of the present delivery system and staff's tolerance for change. Substantial constraints on creativity in a dropout prevention program generally come from a lack of program autonomy, rigid role definitions, and inertia. Here are some ways to counteract these constraints:

- **A lack of program or school building autonomy due to a bureaucratic overlay of federal, state, and district regulations.** State policies usually stipulate the amount of time that students must be in school. States also specify the number of Carnegie units taken and define their measurement. Dropout prevention programs involving flexible scheduling and out-of-school experiences may be difficult to plan with these regulations. On the other hand, state officials are sometimes willing to suspend stipulations about the use of school space and time if you convince them that no decrease in academic performance will occur. They are also more open to innovations now because of concern for at-risk students.

- **Rigid definitions of teacher and student roles.** Teachers' union contracts may limit the range of strategies. The union representative should be informed of and involved in developing a plan of action to retain students. The point can be made that effective dropout prevention efforts not only improve the culture in which students learn but also the culture in which teachers teach.

Staff may also resist an innovation because it requires them to redefine their familiar roles. Here are some additional suggestions for responding creatively to role rigidity problems:

- Involve teachers in initial planning, and have a representative on the task force. This will help teachers feel that they are a part of the decision-making process that redefines their roles. Consequently, they will feel empowered rather than imposed upon by outsiders.

- Define clearly what program administrators will expect of teachers and provide training for any new roles. Emphasize how the change in roles will improve the school climate.

- Involve the teachers who are most enthusiastic about making the changes (or who are already performing in the new, desired roles) in implementing the strategies initially. These teachers can later serve as models for those who resisted the change at first. In this way, role changes can be gradually and willingly adopted by all teachers. A similar tactic involves having teachers who have worked at selected "pilot" schools within the district go to nonpilot schools to help these schools adopt the new practices.

- Implement the program using a strategy of gradual adoption; that is, rather than implementing the plan all at once, let the schools adopt it by a slow accretion of strategies.

o **Inertia created by being caught up in everyday tasks and paper shuffling.** Beyond rules and regulations that inhibit innovation lies the simple human tendency to resist change.

Inertia may be overcome by defining a need for change and assuming a leadership role. Ambiguity about leadership will perpetuate the inertia; assumption of responsibility to address a problem will mobilize resources for change. Seeing the necessity of change will in itself motivate change.

School leaders may also increase staff's tolerance for change by persuading staff that the dropout prevention program's innovations actually aren't changes in the essence of their work; rather, they are mostly a matter of doing more of the same--that is, more of what the teachers and the school have already done that has proven effective in retaining students.

Another persuasive approach is to point out that other schools are already practicing this strategy and being successful. You could also argue that, although this is a new practice, the strategy is consistent with the spirit of efforts that are already in place.

The necessity for change is rooted in the nature of the problem. A major obstacle to implementing a dropout prevention program is the failure of involved persons to perceive and define the problem clearly. The task force must sensitize the school board and the community to the needs of at-risk students and make them aware of the nature and extent of the dropout problem. Teachers and other staff also need inservice training on the dropout problem.

At all times, the problem should be presented as a solvable one. If it is not seen this way, people will tend to deny any responsibility for trying to resolve it. Defensiveness in general is a common obstacle to making any kind of change.

Schools are held accountable in large part for the dropout problem. Realistically, though, many factors outside of school contribute to the dropout rate, such as a student's problems with family, the legal system, work, peer group, community, or social service agency. Similarly, many institutions have a role to play in keeping students in school. The school, however, is in a unique position to help students simply because it is the only place where all youth gather together for a solid block of time.

For this reason, the main focus of dropout prevention interventions will be in the school. Program efforts need to focus on empowering all actors in the school environment: empowering administrators to lead others in defining and solving problems, empowering teachers to contribute creatively to modifying and improving the school and student life, and empowering students to use the school as a resource for linking to the community and assuming productive roles in society.

Implementation of Strategies

After selecting the preferred strategies, the task force next must put these strategies together into a coherent plan of action. This involves deciding how to institutionalize the program activities for retaining students.

The task is largely a matter of choosing among structural options. A number of options are in use in successful dropout prevention efforts around the country, including the following:

- **The "adopt-a-student" approach.** The administrator of the program may encourage individual school professionals to engage in a one-to-one, mutual problem-solving process with at-risk students. This approach is one of the least structured.

- **The team approach.** A moderately structured effort may gather a team of concerned adults to help individual at-risk students in a school.

- **The school-within-a-school approach.** An administrator may set up a school-within-a-school program that targets students having at-risk indicators. Under such a program, significant elements in a school may be restructured (e.g., schedules, curricula, instructional approaches, extra instructional support such as tutoring, and so forth) for the target population only.

- **School or districtwide approaches.** On a school level, administrators may formulate policies that (1) decrease the factors that make school an alienating environment for some students and (2) heighten the sense of belonging for all students. On a districtwide level, administrators may establish **alternative schools** in separate buildings for at-risk students, such as pregnant teens, low achievers, working students, LEP students, and experiential learners.

The work of the task force does not conclude with development of the program plan. In cooperation with school administrators, it also oversees the program's

implementation, evaluation, and improvement. Here are the administrative duties involved in carrying out these tasks:

1. Set school objectives for student retention
2. Assign roles and responsibilities
3. Monitor the quality of role performance
4. Evaluate the effectiveness of the program periodically, once it has been implemented
5. Make appropriate changes to upgrade the program based on evaluation and the feedback of program participants

Conclusion

This chapter presented a formula and suggestions for planning an effective dropout prevention effort. The next chapter, which concludes Part 1 of this guidebook, defines and examines the **integrated learning environment**--the key concept upon which nearly every successful program builds.

Part 2 of the guide offers information a task force can use in making informed decisions. The chapters in Part 2 present a range of alternatives from which to select in customizing a local dropout prevention effort. The central concept of the integrated learning environment serves as the framework upon which each option is conceived and presented.

CHAPTER 3

THE INTEGRATED LEARNING ENVIRONMENT (ILE)

Most effective dropout prevention efforts essentially build upon the use of an **integrated learning environment (ILE)**, whether the change agents call it that or not. This chapter discusses that key concept, shows how its infusion can improve schools' service and support for at-risk students, examines how traditional school structures and policies miss the mark, and compares the structures of schools with traditional versus integrated learning environments. Those who plan and implement dropout prevention efforts need to understand the concept and its implications for policies and practices.

The Concept

Most students drop out of high school mainly because they do not fit well into the school environment. This happens for a variety of reasons, some of which do not relate immediately to school. For example, students from families or cultures that do not place a high value on education usually find the school environment, with its norms and expectations for academic achievement, uncomfortable.

Other students drop out of school for reasons that are directly related to the school. They feel that they do not fit in for one or more of the following reasons:

- Students are not asked, in a sense, to participate in school, due to a lack of careful attendance monitoring and intensive efforts to improve attendance.
- Inflexible school schedules do not accommodate students' schedules.
- School policies (such "push-out" policies as holding students back a grade, and out-of-school suspensions) discourage "difficult" students from staying in school.
- Schools do not actively connect individuals within the school and do not link students to people outside the school in the broader community, of which students are members.
- School staff do not engage students in a personal or individualized way.
- Curricula do not address students' real needs or interests.
- Instructors do not tailor learning experiences to individual learning styles, pace, or level of competency.
- Students find the school experience irrelevant to their everyday life.

This guidebook focuses on remedying these school-related factors in the dropout problem because they directly affect how schools can manipulate their organizational features to help students fit better into the school.

An environment in which most dropout-prone students fit into the school is the ILE. Of course, schools are already integrated in many ways, but improving and

increasing this integration can increase their ability to keep students in school and help them succeed. The concept of the integrated learning environment, as treated in this chapter, is, of course, an ideal construct. But examining that ideal here will help draw important insights into the nature of a learning environment that retains students.

A learning environment, in general, is simply any structured environment where learning occurs, whether in a formal school or work, home, or other out-of-school setting. A learning environment is **integrated** when the system that structures the environment is both relatively open in terms of its boundaries and has interconnected elements within the system.

The elements of a school system include students, parents, teachers, administrators, counselors, other professionals, businesses, and the community. At present, boundaries exist between the school and the surrounding community, between the secondary school and schools at other levels, and between the various departments and services within a school. An ILE makes these boundaries more permeable so that previously isolated elements in the school system can be pulled together into a better functioning whole. By increasing the permeability of these boundaries, a school system can recombine the elements so that the system can become **open** and **interconnected**--the two distinctive features of an ILE.

In an ILE, actors in the school system work together in new and closer ways. Their new openness lets them interact with each other more effectively to fulfill a common larger purpose. Their new structural interconnectedness creates a school in which each member feels (1) that he or she is carrying out a function necessary to fulfill the purpose of the entire learning community and (2) that he or she is fully supported by other members in doing the tasks associated with the function. Thus, a school with high retentive power replicates a supportive work setting.

The ILE is a supportive work setting whose purpose is not simply to perpetuate the system, but rather to involve the actors in the system in creating, sustaining, and improving it. Integrating the learning environment is both process and product. In such an environment, for example, students learn how to integrate their learning experiences into a coherent whole. They can do so because they participate in creating and maintaining their own learning environment (which gives them a sense of ownership and control) and because that environment requires them to integrate aspects of itself in their day-to-day activities (which gives them practice in extracting meaning from their school experiences). Similar benefits accrue to adult participants, as well.

The maintenance of the ILE is a cooperative endeavor among all actors in the school system, which focuses each individual on the task that needs to be done while also orienting the individual to the larger purpose of furthering that system. As a result of participating in this self-elaborating system, students become more committed to learning because learning occurs in a context created by a cooperative endeavor. In addition, the scope of learning is broadened for students since they are challenged to extract meaning from their school experiences in making unique contributions to the ILE. As a consequence of being in this environment, students should develop the basic tools necessary to integrate other environments that they will encounter in the course of their life into coherent wholes. Hence, they will be ready for a lifetime of learning in the workplace.

In summary, dropout prevention efforts should use **integrated** learning environments--environments that are both open and interconnected. With enough openness

and interconnectedness, school professionals can work together effectively to provide opportunities for students to succeed both within and outside of the school building. Student also learn how to integrate their diverse experiences into meaningful wholes and develop a heightened commitment to enriching their educational experiences by relating them directly to their life concerns.

Clearly, schools that want greater retentive power should plan for the full participation of all students in an integrated learning environment. As a dropout prevention task force develops a plan of action, it should try to think in terms of whether the plan and the way it is implemented will serve to put the concept of the ILE into practice. Later chapters illustrate practical ways in which the ILE concept operates in a dropout prevention effort.

How ILE Helps At-Risk Students

In order for involved actors in the school to work together effectively, they must adopt new patterns of interacting. This pattern may be characterized as a **participative management style** (Gaston 1987). In this style of management, participants engage in shared goal setting and decision making, teamwork, group participation, and supportive leadership. Communication flows in both directions, on and across all levels. Channels of communication are also more open to parents and the community. Adoption of this style empowers all actors in the school environment.

The implications of heightened participation are far-reaching. For example, increased participation may entail redefining the goal of the secondary school. The traditional mission of the high school organization is "to articulate a specific body of knowledge, skills, and behavioral patterns in the form of a curriculum and then to pass this curriculum on to students" (Cusick 1973, p. 206). Making the school environment more participatory and, hence, more integrated implies that curricula should not merely be "passed on" to students. Rather, curricula are formed via a collaborative effort to help students understand and pull together aspects of their environment so that they can demonstrate initiative and responsibility.

In an ILE, the organizational mission of the school is to help its students develop the tools they need to integrate their experiences into a coherent whole, as opposed to a mission of pouring a particular, predefined content into passive minds. As Dewey (1963) noted:

> There is, I think, no point in the philosophy of progressive education which is sounder than its emphasis upon the importance of the participation of the learner in the formation of the purposes which direct his activities in the learning process. (p. 67)

Not only do students become active participants in forming their educational experiences, but the community and school as a whole provide resources for the expansion of learning opportunities. In effect, the participants devise creative ways to network resources. They do so by working together in ways that are not traditional, such as--

- the collaboration of academic and vocational teachers to develop courses in applied academic subjects,

- o the use of mentors from the community to coordinate learning projects in their area of expertise,
- o the involvement of students in community affairs through community service,
- o the use of parent volunteers to monitor halls,
- o the invitation to mental health and health care professionals to render some of their services within the school building.

As a result of such networking, schools can prepare students for productive roles in society by actually **giving** them productive roles in society. The best preparation is actual experience.

The traditional way that schools prepare students for the workplace is inadequate. A more direct preparation would entail exposure to actual and simulated work settings. Work settings are distinguished by tasks that are interlocked with the completion of other tasks and by an orientation to producing real-life goods or services in actual, problematic situations that affect persons outside the organization.

If classrooms became more like work settings, students would come to view the school as a supportive workplace. What makes this "restructured" learning environment distinctive is the fact that all participants--students and adults--use cooperative and experiential activities to create even more opportunities to use experiential and cooperative learning! In effect, they learn to use these tools to create yet more tools for learning. The focus of all this activity, of course, remains on the vocational, psychosocial, and academic development of students.

Such educational experiences fill a vital need. People have a strong desire to put things together in a coherent whole. However, each person and each culture does this in different ways and in different domains. Educators should not be asking how they can put things together for the student for the sake of creating or maintaining continuity in the curriculum. Rather, educators should consider how they can give students **the tools needed to put things together for themselves** and impart a fundamental understanding of this process as it is embedded in the students' real-life experiences.

Basically, an integrated learning environment with participative management helps students **learn how to learn.** To achieve this, educators must abandon the outmoded notion that there is a static body of knowledge constituting a curriculum. Knowledge is in constant flux and evergrowing in contemporary society. In place of this, secondary education should aim to give students the basic tools that they need to adapt to a changing world. The best way to do this is to create that reality in the schools. In their efforts to restructure secondary education, schools should simulate supportive work settings that stimulate intellectual, emotional, and social change and growth.

The outcomes for students in these restructured environments can be very positive. The ILE creates a group feeling among students and a cohesiveness in the school, a team spirit. The ILE also gives students a sense of productive membership in society. It also provides success experiences that raise self-esteem among students, especially at-risk students. Finally, by helping students learn how to integrate their own knowledge and experience, ILE strengthens their options for going on to postsecondary education, or starting a career, or combining the two.

Schools that have high retentive power characteristically involve elements of an I.L.E. These elements include a participative management system, a blended curriculum (combining both vocational and academic components), a high school networked with resources inside and outside of the school system, and a relevant education.

How Traditional Schools Miss the Mark

The organizational features of most high schools today are not conducive to retaining a significant number of students (Gaston 1987). Cusick (1973) has listed a number of intended and unintended effects of the school as an organization. These effects result from and reinforce the guiding purpose of the institution, which is to pass along a specific body of knowledge in the form of curriculum to students.

The effects that schools **intend**, and which flow from this purpose, include the following:

- Teachers specialize in subject matter, which is the rationale for the authority accorded them by students and legitimizes the downward flow of information from teachers to students.
- The school is vertically organized, with administrators at the top of the hierarchy, then teachers and other staff (e.g., counselors) in the middle, and finally the undifferentiated mass of students at the bottom.
- The heirachical organization is based on the doctrine of adolescent inferiority, which justifies the subordinate roles of students.
- The communication flow is downward from administrators to teachers to students. Very little meaningful communication occurs horizontally (e.g., from teacher to teacher) or upward (e.g., from student to teacher).
- Teachers, whose concerns center on delivering the material of their specialty, end up processing their students as a batch in order to direct the learning activity of a group of students.
- To conduct subject-specific instruction at the appropriate time and in the correct classrooms, the activity of teachers and students must be routinized.
- The school then needs a body of rules and regulations to ensure that students adhere to this routine.
- Students accept their subordinate role, since schools were never intended to offer immediate rewards; hence, schools are future-reward oriented.
- Finally, the physical arrangements of the school reinforce all of the aforementioned characteristics, especially classrooms in which the teacher instructs from the front of the room to an array of students in ordered seats.

In essence, students are told what to do, when to do it, and how to do it by teachers. Teachers derive their authority from having a specialty. Administrators concern themselves with maintaining a smoothly running organization so that teachers can do their jobs.

Cusick (1973) also offers insights about the **unintended** effects of traditional schools' organization. He notes that little student-teacher interaction occurs and suggests the following as a reason:

> The school, with its emphasis on teacher-initiated action, its routine, batch processing, and reliance on maintenance procedures, provides an enormous amount of time when students are actually required to do little other than be in attendance and minimally compliant. (p. 211)

For this reason, there is seldom any encouragement for either teachers or students to go beyond the requirements for orderliness, attention, and compliance.

In addition to expectations of minimal compliance, the roles that teachers usually assume do not involve them in meaningful dialogue with the students. If teachers want to discuss a student's concern intensively, they have to step out of the role of subject-matter expert, batch processor of students, and maintainer of order and discipline. As Cusick (1973) points out,

> the downward communication flow, the massing of students, and the specialized task of the teacher are simply not conducive to interaction. In fact, the rules, regulations, and routine actually serve to substitute for interaction. If one is aware of them, he [the student] does not need to ask or check with the teacher to be sure he is doing the correct thing and can actually go through many consecutive days in school without being selected for anything individually or even talking to a teacher. He may experience interaction with his teacher only when he violates some rule. (p. 211)

The doctrine of adolescent inferiority also reinforces low student-teacher interaction: a superior cannot have meaningful dialogue with one who is inferior. The requirements imposed by the school organization are best fulfilled by students who are docile memorizers, not critical thinkers (Romanish 1987).

The lack of meaningful dialogue--a symptom of school organization, not individual teacher behavior--goes hand in hand with another unintended effect of the institutional arrangement: the fragmentation of educational experience. Cusick (1973) makes this observation:

> As the separate courses are combined into sequences, it is assumed that the student will internalize and assimilate these subjects into an integrated whole and will become capable of fulfilling the personal and social goals of education. (p. 16)

A contradiction thus arises in the organization: on the one hand, students are allowed to structure their own educational experiences and it is **assumed** they can integrate their competencies in diverse areas; on the other hand, classrooms seem to be organized on the assumption that teachers must select, synthesize, and present relevant materials for students.

The Shopping Mall High School (Powell, Ferrar, and Cohen 1985) hints at reasons for this contradiction. It is "a widespread American belief that nearly everybody should attend high school, nearly everybody should graduate from high school, and nearly everybody should find the experience constructive" (p. 1). Yet schools are faced with the great challenge of accommodating a very diverse student population. To cater to all students requires curricular variety, choice among courses, and a

neutrality about these choices. Hence, the lack of guidance provided to create a constructive high school experience for all exists side by side with the curricular diversity.

Given this situation, it appears as if educators cannot agree on a set of core competencies that all students need to make their experiences coherent. Traditional schools make no systematic effort to link material to students' interests and plans, to connect student activities to the concerns of the larger school and community, and, most important, to require that students create and synthesize materials, experiences, and skills to acquire that most basic of all skills--the ability to learn how to learn.

Traditional vs. Integrated Learning Environments

The number of young people who are dropping out of school is appalling. The most recent figures from the U.S. Department of Education indicate that the national dropout rate is 29.4 percent (*USA Today* 11 February 1987). Dropping out is usually just one manifestation of a much larger youth problem of disengagement and alienation from the mainstream of life. Of particular concern is the economic marginality of youth.

Since some school-related factors clearly exacerbate the dropout problem, proper manipulation of these factors should ameliorate the problem. One approach is to restructure schools to offer integrated learning environments. Such an environment is both more open and interconnected than the traditional school environment. People in this environment experiment with new ways of collaborating with each another to make effective, motivating educational experiences possible for students. Figures 1 and 2 compare the organizational structure of an ILE with the traditional one.

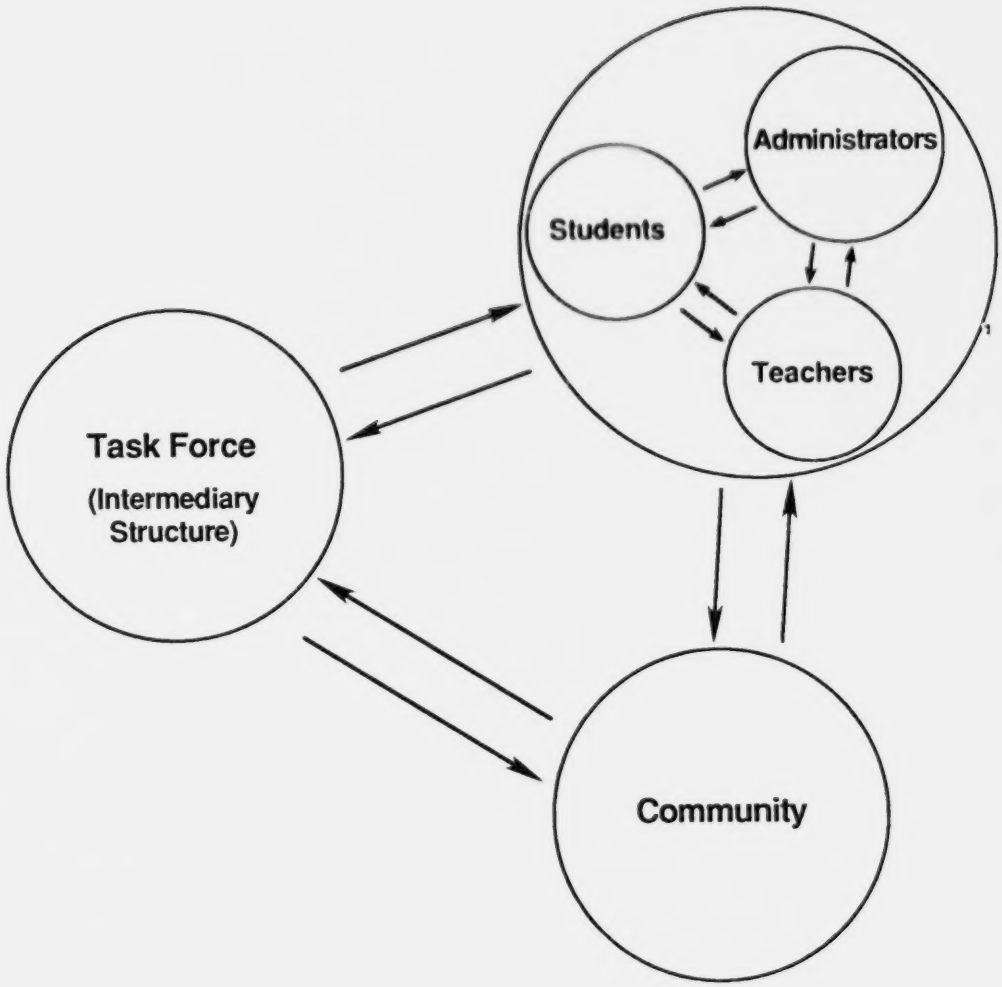
In figure 1, the solid lines indicate a strong communication flow among collaborators operating in a comfortable, collegial manner. In figure 2, the broken lines indicate a weak communication flow caused by an overemphasis on hierarchy and role rigidity. Arrows indicate the direction of the flow.

As mentioned earlier, the communication flow in an ILE is bidirectional, involves entities outside the school, and uses a nonhierarchical structure. Note that a system that supports an open and interconnected school structure needs information and energy from outside the immediate system to revitalize it continually and to provide it with direction. In contrast, the communication flow in the traditional school is largely undirectional, occurs in a self-contained context, and flows along a hierarchical structure. Research suggests that the lack of active student participation in traditional schools lowers their retention rate (Gaston 1987). Thus, an ILE should have greater holding power.

One of the most important things that students actually learn in an ILE is **how** to learn, because the environment challenges them to work together and produce real outcomes. The environment provides a coopeative and experiential learning setting.

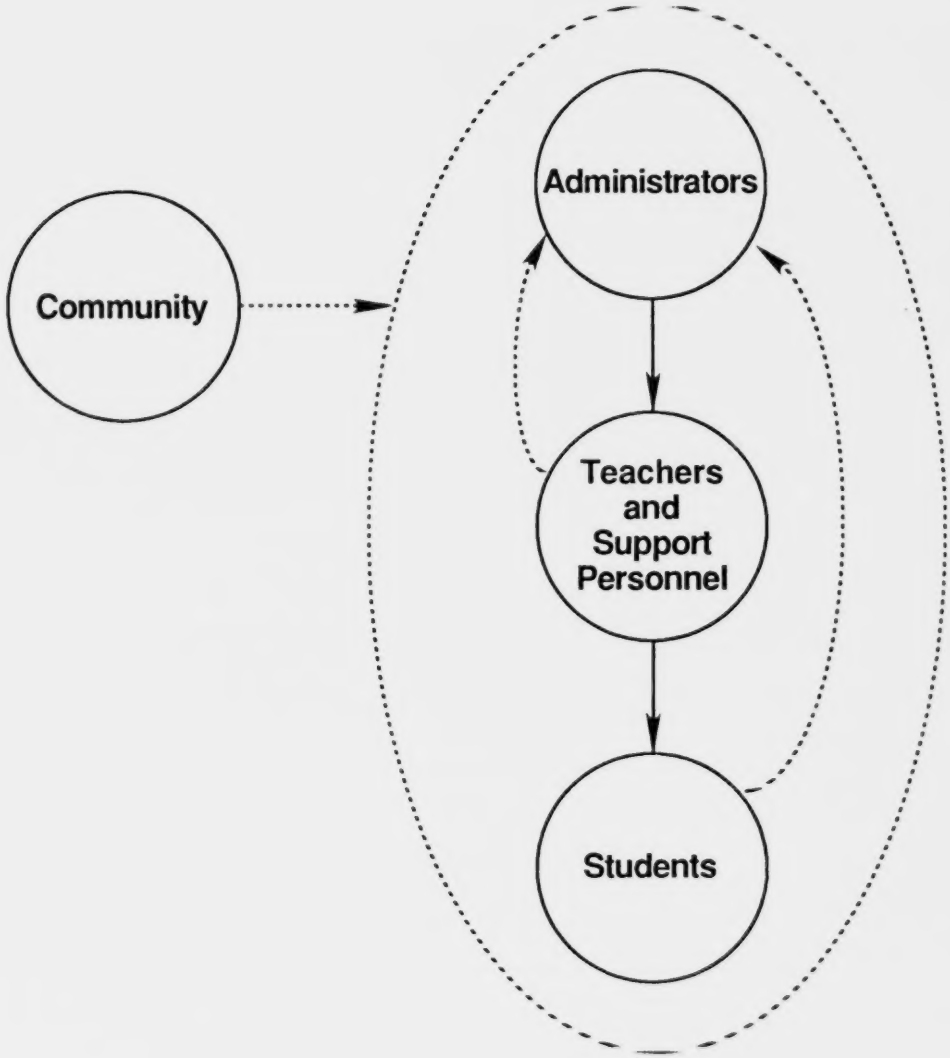
The four key precepts of an integrated learning environment are as follows:

o School should be like a supportive workplace. (It is not actually a workplace, however, because it is not strictly product- or service-driven.)



Solid, bidirectional arrows indicate mutual communication that is strong and encourages equal participation.

Figure 1. Structure of the integrated learning environment



Solid, downward-pointing arrows indicate a communication flow that is relatively constant and downward.

Broken lines indicate weak (nonparticipatory), infrequent communication and input of energy.

Figure 2. Traditional school structure

- o A school should be open and have interconnected elements.
- o School should set up expectations for the full participation of all students in cooperative and experiential learning activities.
- o School should create an atmosphere of acceptance and mutual respect, where students will feel that they "fit in."

The general concept of an ILE can be represented by the following equation:

Integrated Learning Environment =

Experimental and Cooperative Production System	X	Participatory Maintenance Subsystem

The production subsystem of a school focuses on creating the learning environment. The maintenance subsystem of a school focuses on obtaining the compliance of the participants (students, teachers, and administrators) in sustaining the learning environment.

The production and maintenance subsystems of an ILE differ markedly from those of a traditional school. As table 1 shows, the production subsystems of the traditional versus the integrated learning environments differ along the dimensions of curriculum, instruction, student-teacher interaction, and goals of the classroom experience. The production subsystem of the traditional school concentrates on the transmission of knowledge, skills and behavioral patterns to students. It relies on the specialization of teaching tasks, fixed periods of time, the division of the curriculum into specialized areas, and constant testing and evaluating.

The maintenance subsystems are compared along the dimensions associated with the administration of people, time, and space. The maintenance subsystem of a traditional school ensures the effectiveness and efficiency of the production subsystem. The maintenance subsystem is usually administered by the vice-principal. It relies on the use of rules and regulations for the pass system, tardiness, truancy, misconduct in the classroom and hall, the care of school property, and so on.

Although schools today are more integrated, there are aspects of traditional schools which are highlighted in table 1 that all educators need to know about (and avoid) in order to increase retentive power of the schools.

In moving toward a more integrated learning environment, participants will inevitably encounter obstacles. Forces likely to oppose integration include subject-matter specialization, curricular diversity, lack of a clear organizational mission, pressure from special interests groups, and lack of interaction among school actors.

An example of a lack of interaction among school actors is the minimal interaction that occurs between academic and vocational educators. To collaborate, these educators must overcome organizational compartmentalization, fundamental differences in educational philosophy, and, too frequently, mutual disdain. Vocational education is

TABLE 1

TRADITIONAL SCHOOL/INTEGRATED LEARNING ENVIRONMENT

SUB SYSTEM / ENVIRONMENT		TRADITIONAL SCHOOL ENVIRONMENT	INTEGRATED LEARNING ENVIRONMENT
MAINTENANCE SUB SYSTEM	**Features**	**Abstract and prescriptive**	**Cooperative and experiential**
	Curriculum	Static; conceived as fixed, content to be "passed on."	Career focused; oriented to life planning; required grasp of core concepts and basic skills and facts.
	Instruction	Verbal; auditory mode of presentation; lecture format.	Self-paced, competency-based, individualized instruction.
	Teacher/ Student Interaction	Downward communication flow; restricted to subject matter.	Teacher is counselor and mentor, but more of a reciprocal dialogue; **learning** activities are largely student-directed (the teacher only makes sure that learning actually occurs).
	Goals	Minimal compliance and attendance	Learning how to learn; learning how to pull things together into a coherent whole.
PRODUCTION SUB SYSTEM	**Features**	**Hierarchical**	**Participative**
	Admin. of Space	School as a self-contained system (school treated as an island); within this system, the departments and services are relatively isolated from each other, fulfilling their respective functions independently; attendance is monitored, but no systematic efforts are made at improvement.	The learning environment is simply that—anyplace where learning occurs; school serves as a locus where these learning activities are coordinated, but the activities are often outside of the school and involve other-than-professional staff (OTP).
	Admin. of Time	Classes last a fixed amount of time (usually 45 minutes); the school day and year are also fixed (the school year is based on an outmoded agrarian cycle of human activities).	The school day and year are extended to accommodate different schedules so that, for example, community members who want to get involved, students who want to work in the morning, and teachers who wish for flextime to meet family obligations, can.
	Admin. of People	People within the school have rigidly defined roles; people outside the school remain outside the school.	People are empowered and roles are expanded; school is governed by participatory decision making.

often regarded by academic educators as a "dumping ground" for students who are ill-equipped for the academic curriculum. Some vocational educators themselves have a constricted view of vocational education as manual training. But vocational education is potentially a strong integrating force for the curriculum. Applied academic learning can be complemented by vocational education; vocational education infused with basic skills can buttress the academic curriculum.

The magnitude of the dropout problem clearly stresses the need to overcome the forces that impede integration. Dropout prevention becomes a focal point for a broader agenda that includes reformulating the philosophical bases of education and changing educational practices accordingly. The dropout rate is only a symptom; the illness is a lack of integration in the school environment; and the cure is involving all individuals in the school in new and closer ways of working together.

Part II of this guide offers ideas for some potential remedies that program planners should consider when brainstorming strategies for an integrated dropout prevention effort in the schools and community.

PART II

GENERATING STRATEGIES TO CREATE AN INTEGRATED LEARNING ENVIRONMENT

CHAPTER 4

UNITING THE SCHOOL

There is a surprising consensus in the dropout literature that students suffer low self-esteem prior to dropping out. The school has certain organizational features that influence students' self-esteem. Any dropout prevention effort should seek to understand the institutional impact that schools have on students. Dr. James Comer, a professor of child psychiatry at Yale Medical School, has suggested that administrators and teachers need some understanding of "process issues--what kids are like moving through systems, how the management of systems relates directly to the behavior of everybody in them, and how, consequently, to manage systems better" (*ASCD Update* November 1986, p. 4). Understanding the effect the school system has on individual students is part of the knowledge base needed to guide effective dropout prevention.

As mentioned before, the more integrated the school system, the higher its retentive power. Students can't fit into a school that isn't "together" in the first place. The fact of low retentive power constitutes a critique of schools in terms of their cohesiveness. Creating an integrated learning environment for students will help them fit into school because it becomes essential that they participate in its creation and recreation by definition. So, the purpose of the cooperative endeavor that becomes the locus of learning is to create that very context of a cooperative endeavor. Of course, every social system has some degree of such self-reflexivity. But in school, the social system itself becomes the object of production/reproduction. By being in an ILE, a student develops the basic tools needed for productive living by creating and sustaining an environment where other students can develop these basic tools.

An ILE is especially therapeutic for underachieving students. When those who are underachieving start to believe that they are valued by others or are trusted to make decisions for themselves, they become motivated to realize more of their potential. The key to increasing the achievement levels of schools lies in developing the positive attitude of people one to another within the school. This climate presumes meaningful connectedness among all people in the school system. And this is particularly important for those at the margin of the school organization--those students having withdrawn due to a history of academic failure and those with minority backgrounds. Organizational patterns that are effective in retaining high-risk students are responsive to the special affective and learning needs of these students.

Minorities face unique challenges. Students from Spanish-speaking homes may be at a disadvantage in classrooms. Blacks are suspended from high schools three times as often as whites (Howe and Edelman 1985). Given this context, it is not surprising that the dropout rate for blacks is 40 percent greater than for whites. For Hispanics, the dropout rate is 250 percent higher than the white dropout rate (Mann 1986a).

Strategies that are effective for these students help them feel as though they are making a unique contribution to the school, that they are valued members of the school. A crucial aspect of this is feeling support from other students. Feeling and receiving this support may be a great challenge for a limited English-proficient (LEP) student. However, some schools have responded to this issue in a very creative way, and the response is a good illustration of the point. Rather than regarding LEP students as an irritation, these schools have their Spanish-speaking students paired with English-speaking students to create an exchange program of sorts. The Spanish-speaking students teach Spanish and the English-speaking students teach English. A

"problematic" situation becomes reconstrued as a win-win situation. All students become tutors and, thus, all feel as though they have a unique contribution to make to their peers and the school.

A main focus of any dropout prevention effort is to increase the cohesiveness of the school environment. The organizational features characterizing a tight-knit school have a positive impact on students' self-esteem. Such a learning environment has an overarching organizational mission that brings all members together and, therefore, seems very much like a supportive work setting.

For schools, being like a workplace requires that attendance be monitored and improved. It also suggests that schools make linkages to the community and maintain a focus on the mission of the organization. Such a focus is achieved by having order in the school through effective discipline. Being a **supportive** workplace entails providing support services, having flexibility in scheduling, and promoting the talents of each individual. Finally, creating a supportive, work-like setting has an obvious significance to vocational educators. Creating settings that are practical and cooperative is their expertise. Heightening those aspects within their programs and generalizing them to the school setting will increase a school's holding power. These are the goals for which educators may aim in restructuring their schools.

Dynamics of Low Self-Esteem

The thrust of all dropout prevention efforts is the promotion of the at-risk youths' self-esteem. Understanding the characteristics and dynamics of low self-esteem is crucial in forming the knowledge base that will professionalize dropout prevention. From an in-depth understanding of low self-esteem, one can articulate a structure that organizes and relates some of the essential features of a successful dropout prevention effort. Pursued deeply, the concept of low self-esteem is rich enough and powerful enough to lend meaning to the diverse historical, economic, and sociological forces forming the experiences of individuals. Through the related constructs of dispossession and alienation, one can acknowledge extra-individual, structural properties of schools but from the perspective of the individual.

Intuitively, people with low self-esteem feel badly about themselves. Individuals around those with low self-esteem have indicated their negative feelings toward those with low self-esteem. The vulnerable person's self-esteem is lowered when he or she internalizes those negative feelings. This process is called "identification with the aggressor" and not only names one of the characteristics of low self-esteem, but also gives insight into how self-esteem is lowered. These negative feelings about one's self undermines one's confidence that the world presents a wealth of opportunities waiting to be seized. A person with low self-esteem no longer feels secure in his or her capacity to cope with the challenges of self-development and manipulation of the environment. Any problematic circumstance will create a great deal of anxiety in such an individual. Consequently, frustration cannot be readily tolerated. The second characteristic of low self-esteem is precisely this low tolerance for frustration (coupled with a high anxiety level) (Gordon and Everley n.d.).

Analyzing the characteristics and dynamics of low self-esteem suggests general strategies to preserve and promote self-esteem. If individuals with low self-esteem have internalized the negative feedback of others, it seems natural that surrounding these individuals with positive, supportive people will counteract the prior negative

feedback. Identification with supportive individuals is one strategy to preserve self-esteem.

Another generic strategy is suggested by at-risk students' low tolerance for frustration. If individuals with low self-esteem are easily frustrated, the reasonable course of action is to provide them with more immediate gratification by giving them easily accomplished tasks or focusing on tasks at which they are or can be proficient, with relatively little effort.

Connected with this strategy is the strategy that puts in place opportunities for these students to experience success. These opportunities generally lie outside those traditionally offered by schools. Traditional areas of achievement are often inaccessible to these students due to their current skill level, past frustrations, and lack of available support. More accessible areas may be nonacademic. If these students can achieve in non-traditional areas, they will build the confidence needed to confront the more frustrating, traditional areas. These accomplishments are supported and **felt** in a group context. Thus, an important aspect of any dropout prevention effort is its enhancement of a sense of belonging to school. Each student in school should be able to say, "I belong and I have a valuable contribution to make to the group." Belonging to a group also provides the student with a support system to cope with the challenges of living.

An outline of an effort that addresses problems of self-esteem would have the following form:

Efforts addressing problems of self-esteem:

A. Two characteristics of low self-esteem

1. Identification with the aggressor
2. Low tolerance for frustration

B. Two strategies to preserve self-esteem:

1. Identification with positive, supportive individuals
2. Provision of immediate gratification

C. Two strategies to promote self-esteem:

1. Provision of success experiences
2. Enhancement of sense of belonging

The strategies above are shown in table 2 as functions of the level of intervention (school-level or one-on-one) and area of concern with regard to raising self-esteem. Each cell elaborates on the implementation of the strategy by considering it in relation to some of the following factors:

o Effective classroom techniques

o Effects of standards and requirements

o Relevance of teacher preparation and competencies

TABLE 2

THE STRUCTURE OF EFFORTS DESIGNED TO PROMOTE SELF-ESTEEM AMONG POTENTIAL DROPOUTS

School Level	Level of the Individual
INCREASE OF COHESIVENESS	IDENTIFICATION WITH SUPPORTIVE PERSON
• School leaders articulating and enforcing fair and consistent rules about student behavior, thereby making school safer and "saner" places to be	• Staff making clear expectations about achievements and providing immediate feedback on pupil progress; also addressing the needs of the child by expanding roles into one of advocates
• Creating a teacher culture predicated on collegiality and team decision making	• The importance of individual support of students as they try to meet the challenge of excellence
• Attendance improvement efforts and reorganizing schools into schools-within-a-school to lower student/teacher ratio; also feedback systems to identify and respond to at-risk students and administrative guidance and support in creating roles for intervention	• Promulgating a student-centered philosophy among the staff that instills a push for excellence
• Linking to services in the community and to social service agencies	• Enhancing counseling and referral—provided by someone who truly cares
• Adopting policies that recognize the impact of grade retention on tendency to drop out	• Counsling services: peer, group, and individual
	• Support services provided by community agencies: individual and family counseling, health services, social work services, planned parenthood, etc.
	• Supportive, caring, vigorous responses to self-report of intention to drop out; quick, personal response to absenteeism/truancy
PROVISION OF SUCCESS EXPERIENCE	OPPORTUNITIES WITH SUPPORTIVE PERSON
• Incorporating high-interest courses and experimental methods into the curriculum	• Formulating achievable, short-term goals
• Providing remedial support to those who need help in meeting more rigorous standards Being sensitive to individual differences in learning styles and interests	• Teacher willingness to be "life-oriented" instead of academic-centered
• Creating referrals to alternative programs that have a strong non-academic, experiential component	• Flexible scheduling to make school less frustrating; also summer programs to help credit-deficient students catch up
• Vocational assessment used for educational development planning	• Acting out behavior and discipline problems of those students—related to their high anxiety level and low tolerance for frustration
• Providing students with non-academic ways to experience success	

- o Effects of school policies and practices
- o Adequacy of problem identification and remediation
- o Support groups and networks
- o Learning deficit accrual patterns
- o Critical incidents and intervention points

Focus of Dropout Prevention Efforts

Helping At-Risk Youth Overcome Frustrations and Meet Challenges

Taking a "systems" approach to the study of the dropout problem prompts researchers to view the potential dropout as an individual whose behavior is influenced by a system that includes peers, family, school, and community. Each of the components of this system have undergone change, and these changes have placed stressors on at-risk youth. Recent stressors placed on the institution of the family include (1) poverty--more and more school-age children come from low-income families, (2) the growing number of households headed by single women, and (3) the situations where both parents are working. As a consequence of the stresses placed on the family, the family finds it difficult to adapt flexibly to the demands of the environment due to a lack of financial and temporal resources. Consequently, a family becomes less responsive to a child's needs--including his or her school-related needs--so children turn to each other (especially latch-key children) for support. Peer culture then becomes more influential than parents in the molding of values, aspirations, and behavior. Schools have the potential to fill the vacuum that peers now fill for these alienated children (Bronfenbrenner 1986).

School is an institution that has not adapted to the changing needs of students passing through the educational system. Schools have a limited range of programs, services, and practices to offer a diverse student population. The low achiever faces rising academic standards with no accompanying increase in remediation. A student undergoing the stresses of premature parenting finds school more of a hindrance than a help. The pupil who needs or wants full-time employment confronts rigid scheduling practices and graduation requirements. And the experiential learner is disenchanted by an auditory mode of presentation and a conceptual approach to subjects. Many schools are not being responsive.

In general, students drop out because they are frustrated by school. Theoretically, the experience of frustration arises when needs are unmet for prolonged periods. When expectations for achieving a goal are blocked, one feels frustrated. Responses to frustration range from adaptive, problem-solving maneuvers to acting-out or withdrawing (Compton and Galaway 1984). When schools fail to accommodate the circumstances of a student's life, the student becomes dropout prone. The circumstances vary from student to student, but certain populations experience unique or additional stresses that make it particularly difficult to cope with the demands of student life. Limited English-proficiency (LEP) students, disaffected students, pregnant teens or teen mothers, students who need or want to work, and experiential learners are groups that may have more challenges to meet in their efforts to graduate than "ordinary" students. When such frustration is unrelieved and sustained, a student

begins to feel inadequate. The student gradually withdraws from the school environment, an environment that has produced negative experiences for the student. Withdrawal may begin as tardiness and class cutting, progress to absenteeism, and culminate in the decision to drop out. Such a decision is reasonable from the student's point of view: the school environment has proven to be unresponsive to his or her particular problems, so there are not advantages to staying in school, and perhaps, some disadvantages. At this point, the student becomes alienated from school life. Low self-esteem on a psychological level is paralleled on a sociological level by alienation. Such alienation is expressed by becoming truant, getting suspended, doing poorly in schoolwork, cutting classes, or focusing energy on activities outside of the school. The student begins to sense that the value of school is not great enough to justify the struggle to persist. A background of resignation and despair combined with a precipitating event ("the last straw") prompts the decision to drop out.

Heightening Commitment to Learning

Despite the panoply of strategies and the diversity of structures in which to implement them, all dropout prevention efforts have an underlying theme. The goal of all these efforts is to raise the self-esteem among potential dropouts. The school environment can change to make a school a less frustrating place to be and open up more opportunities for success experiences by increasing curricular options. These changes will enhance the self-esteem of at-risk students and may occur at many different levels--from the school, program, and classroom level, to the level of concerned adults, down to the student's own efforts at self-help. It is also expected that restructuring the school will make school more attractive to all students.

Of course, if students are to benefit from enriched learning opportunities, they must be in school to seize those opportunities. To achieve this, schools need to implement policies that (1) make it more convenient for students to attend and finish school (e.g., flexible scheduling; open-entry, open-exit), (2) target at-risk students for the extra level of support that they may need to finish school, (3) rescind pushout policies, and (4) encourage attendance. In addition, schools will need to open up their boundaries and encourage businesses and community agencies to participate in the education of our youth. The consequences of expanding the circle of the school to encompass the community will be twofold: (1) schools will become more responsive to the needs of families, businesses, and community leaders in preparing youth for meaningful participation in society as citizens, parents, and workers and (2) schools will have a network of resources to deploy in addressing the problems that face youth today.

Seeing education in this broader context points up the fact that no school should be, or actually is, an island. Occurrences within the school (the school being a complex of interrelated elements) are not reducible to teachers, administrators, students, or the community. Rather, all events in the school are products of interactions among these components. Using a systems approach, change agents can avoid thinking they must blame either the student or the environment, and they can generate multiple possibilities for intervention. Schools can expand their boundaries to include more of the community. Corporations, social service agencies, families, and community-based organizations can all participate in the enrichment of the educational experiences of high school students.

To generate strategies systematically, administrators should consider (1) points of intervention and (2) areas of concern. The community-school-potential dropout system is a complex one that manifests the dropout problem. Any one or any combination of these components constitutes effective points of intervention. Of course, those factors most easily manipulated by school administrators are school-related factors. Administrators can make organizational changes that increase the schools' holding power.

The areas in which organizational changes can be made toward dropout prevention in two domains: (1) school-level interventions that result in school-level outcomes and (2) school-level interventions that relate to and impact classrooms. Those interventions linked to school-level outcomes include attendance monitoring and improvement, flexible scheduling, policy changes facilitating student retention, and improvement of school climate. Positive changes in these areas can heighten students' commitment to learning by making school a source of esteem for each student. The changes will help in getting students to come to school, making it less frustrating to continue in school, and setting up a positive school atmosphere.

The essential point is that educators must build up a students' self-confidence. Concerned adults can encourage students to stay in school simply by responding to their needs and by really listening. Of course, this has been said before, but change agents must go beyond saying this to doing it. The remainder of this guide explores ways to institutionalize responsiveness so that the energies of concerned adults are channeled constructively and efficiently.

CHAPTER 5

REDUCING TRUANCY

This chapter and the next three explore ways that schools can manipulate school-level factors related to dropping out. In many school districts, there is a high correlation between levels of truancy and the dropout rate. From this, it can be inferred that practices that reduce absenteeism will also aid in reducing the dropout rate. Schools across the country have developed a number of innovative practices in reducing absenteeism. Among them are the following:

- o Individual counseling for students with erratic attendance
- o Support of regular school attendance by providing transportation
- o Home visits to students with attendance problems to involve parents and assess needs
- o Use of computers to monitor attendance carefully and to respond promptly to a student's absence

In general, practices are directed at improved monitoring, outreach by all concerned (e.g., peers, parents, teachers, probation officers), and the institution of reward systems to reinforce attendance.

Being absent from school is one of the earliest signs of disengagement from school. If the school does not respond promptly and intensively to this warning sign, the disengagement may eventually progress to the point of dropping out. The goal of any effort to decrease absenteeism is to fully reengage the student in the school environment. By encouraging the participation of students, one can prevent them from disengaging from school.

Encouraging all students to participate and expecting that they will do so will enhance the self-esteem of students. A prompt response to student absence should be an expression of caring. The response needs to convey the message: "We wondered where you were. We missed you." In the context of a more integrated learning environment, each student is needed and school is, indeed, less without that student. The cohesiveness of this environment leads naturally to the heightened responsiveness of all actors in the environment. The purpose, then, of attempts to reduce absenteeism is not to punish, but rather to make the poor attenders aware of how they are needed and to find ways to bring them back into the fold.

Any effective practice intended to reduce absenteeism is, therefore, nonpunitive. When a student is absent frequently, the school can respond by notifying quickly all concerned of the absence and keeping accurate records of student absences, problem-solving with concerned others regarding the difficulties the student is having in the school environment (which is leading to disengagement), and rewarding improved attendance.

If members of a task force on dropout prevention or school administrators find that there is a significant relationship between high absenteeism and dropping out in the school or across the district, they may find the three following categories of

strategies useful: attendance monitoring, attendance outreach, and attendance reward systems. Again, the purpose of these strategies should be to--

- o set up an expectancy that students attend class regularly,
- o establish a baseline of attendance performance in order to know when to reward improvement,
- o heighten awareness among staff that the student is experiencing difficulties, and
- o express caring by responding promptly when students are absent.

The subsequent discussion of practices is not meant to be exhaustive. Rather it is intended to help planners generate ideas for reducing absenteeism in particular and lowering the dropout rate in general.

Attendance Monitoring

Recent technological innovations may improve the efficiency and effectiveness of attendance monitoring. In particular, automatic dialing machines and computer-based attendance monitoring systems may aid in keeping track of students' absences.

Automatic dialing machines have been developed by Digital Products Corporation. Telsol, the name of the product, can record messages on endless tapes regarding absence and tardiness. (Telsol can also be used to make wake-up calls.) A person can enter approximately 450 phone numbers into Telsol's memory. Telsol will make all the calls automatically. If the telephone is busy or has no answer, the phone number stays in the memory and two more attempts are subsequently made. Digital Products has claimed that schools using Telsol have increased their attendance by 6, 8, or 10 percent (READ 1985).

The District of Columbia has used automatic dialing machines in a pilot program known as the Student Attendance Service Center. The center monitors attendance with 78 automatic dialing machines that call the homes of children who are absent, tardy, or who skip classes unless a parent first calls the school to explain the absence. One junior high school, using the services of the center, progressed from a 72 percent attendance rate to an 87 percent attendance rate (*Washington Times* 7 November 1985).

Of course, even more can be done than to contact homes through dialing machines. Being able to maintain cumulative attendance records would also be helpful in flagging at-risk students. Some computer-based attendance monitoring systems have been developed for this purpose. At Lake Orion High School in Manchester, Michigan, parents have volunteered their time to develop and maintain a system of monitoring student attendance. The program, called "Improving Attendance--Byte by Byte," employs the following procedure:

1. Calls from parents reporting absences are recorded by a parent volunteer.

2. The names of absent students are entered into a computer.

3. The computer tabulates the absences and maintains a permanent record.

4. A list of excused absences is compiled at the end of the day and placed in teachers' mailboxes.

5. After checking their class attendance record against the list, the teachers determine what absences were unexcused and refer the names of unexcused students to the assistant principals.

6. The two assistant principals contact these students' parents.

The program insures that parents become aware the next day that their children were absent from school. As a result of implementing this new system, the absentee rate has dropped from 9-12 percent to 4-6 percent (READ 1985).

Flint, Michigan, senior high schools use their computer-based attendance monitoring system to generate absence reports, attendance charts (including percentages of students absent by grade), and any student's attendance record. The program will also print letters to parents when a student accumulates five absences in any combination of classes, and again each time the number of absences increases by five. The system not only insures timely communication with parents, but also saves on staff time (READ 1986).

With recent technological advances, what used to be a paperwork nightmare is now far easier. Being able to react when a student is unaccountably missing and has an emerging pattern of disengagement revealed in a high absenteeism rate is part of making school more responsive. A responsive school is a school that can express caring. A student in such a school has enhanced self-esteem.

Attendance Outreach

Concerned individuals can reach out in new ways to those students who are marginal and encourage them to participate more actively and regularly in the school. Attendance outreach efforts serve to connect all individuals concerned with the poor attending student (e.g., parents, teachers, peers) to make those individuals aware of that student's problem, motivate the student to attend regularly, and create an atmosphere where everyone is linked together and all are expected to participate (that is, an integrated learning environment). Peers and parents are often the focus of outreach efforts.

Successful peers have helped marginal students in Project STAY of the St. Louis Public Schools. The report of the project indicated that one school district had a 30 percent increase in attendance during one semester of pairing good and poor attending students as partners. The good attending partner applied positive peer pressure to motivate the poor attending "buddy" to attend school (Willis 1986).

A buddy system can also be created with parents and school professionals to support students in their regular school attendance. The report of Project STAY concluded that the personal contact of professionals with families was the most

effective strategy in reducing absenteeism (Willis 1986). The New York City School system has made a systematic effort to contact the parents of poor attenders and chronic truants. Home visits are made to provide assistance to the students' families in resolving attendance problems. Attendance teachers are assigned primary responsibility for home visits and investigation of truants. Paraprofessionals, known as family assistants, are also employed. Home visits are initiated following the tenth day of absence, if the student has no prior history of poor attendance. If the student has such a history, a home visit occurs on the second day of absence (Quinones 1986).

Attendance workers in the Richmond Public Schools go on home visits as an integral part of their Comprehensive Attendance Program. They are assigned to have contact with the home to determine the reason for the absence. The daily records of phone calls and home visits are made available to counselors, teachers, and principals. On a weekly basis, the counselors, social workers, and the attendance workers discuss the status of absences in the school. As a team, they decide on appropriate referrals to services in the community (e.g., health services, counseling, welfare). Attendance workers also assist the principal in attendance accounting (READ 1986).

Home contacts encourage better student attendance through parent awareness of the child's poor attendance patterns. Parent workshops can be conducted on strategies to get children to school, the educational consequences of poor attendance, and signs of disengagement from school and ways to respond to them. Parent workshops can also focus on broader issues that relate to attendance: parental educational attainment and illiteracy, the consequences of dropping out, and alternatives in school programming. These workshops present opportunities to develop a commitment to education in parents by sharing information about resources for adult basic education. Heightening commitment to education in parents will lead them to encourage their children to attend school regularly.

Attendance outreach efforts attempt to involve concerned others (parents, peers, school staff) in supporting the regular school attendance of poor attenders. Creating positive peer pressure for attendance, involving parents in raising their awareness of an attendance problem, and doing home visits to assess needs and solve problems are some of the activities highlighted in this section. Of course, other activities can also achieve the goals of attendance outreach.

Attendance Incentives

Much creativity has been shown in finding ways to reward improved attendance. Florida's department of education has an innovative suggestion about an incentive approach that also combines peer outreach. Homeroom classes are divided into small groups of students. Each group has a leader. The leadership position is rotated to a new student each week. The leader is responsible for calling the absent student's home to determine the reason for the absence. Each group competes for attendance prizes given at the end of the grading period. Often, local businesses may be willing to donate prizes to groups with the best or most improved attendance (Florida Department of Education 1986).

Providing attendance incentives is an important part of being nonpunitive in encouraging attendance. Experimental psychologists have suggested that the most effective way to change behavior is to reward the behavior that one desires, not to punish the negative behavior. A good illustration of this principle being applied to school attendance is found in a program entitled "Positive Approach to Good Attendance

through Grading" developed in a Glenwood, Iowa, school. In this high school, bonus points are given to students for attendance. As usual, a grading curve is established and each student is given a grade based on academic achievement. The teacher then uses the following scale to reward bonus points based on attendance:

Perfect attendance in class--10 percent bonus
One day absent in class--9 percent bonus
Two days absent in class--8 percent bonus
Three days absent in class--7 percent bonus
Four days absent in class--6 percent bonus
Five days absent in class--5 percent bonus
Six days absent in class--4 percent bonus
Seven days absent in class--3 percent bonus
Eight days absent in class--2 percent bonus
Nine days absent in class--1 percent bonus

The teachers add these bonus points to each student's academic points to improve the grade based on attendance. This system is particularly beneficial to the low ability student who is struggling to master the knowledge and skills presented in class and has perfect attendance. This student is rewarded for his or her perseverance. Note that no student is punished for missing classes, he or she simply doesn't receive the reward of bonus points that a good attending student does. The system also rewards improved attendance. This approach is far superior to simply giving out awards for perfect attendance (READ 1986).

Another program in Alma, Michigan, generates enthusiasm for attending school through a lottery. Alternative Choices in Education, an alternative high school, use the lottery craze to its advantage. Students who have perfect attendance each 3-week marking unit receive tickets for a quarterly prize drawing in the Lottery (the title of the program). The prize is a portable AM/FM radio with head phones. The Lottery is a fun vehicle to use in an effort to attain the serious goal of improving student attendance patterns (READ 1985).

It is important that any reward system for attendance be structured so that improvement in attendance is rewarded. Positive changes in attendance should be rewarded over only rewarding some absolute level of performance. The goal is to change attendance behavior through positive reinforcement, not to punish poor attenders or create an elite of perfect attenders.

Conclusion

Although it is important to improve attendance, it must be remembered that if a school has an impoverished learning environment, then there is no intrinsic reward for being in the program. For example, a counselor at a vocational-technical center in Michigan related this story about an erratic attender: The counselor approached the young man to ask him why he wasn't attending more regularly. The young man gave an apathetic response on the order of "I don't know. I just don't feel like comin' some days." The counselor didn't accept the response at face value and proceeded to administer an interest inventory to the student. The student was currently enrolled in an electronics concentration, but the inventory indicated that accounting might interest him more. The counselor reassigned him to an accounting sequence, and the young man now has perfect attendance. Thus, as this story illustrates, improving

attendance should be viewed in a broader context of enriching the school environment to make it a more attractive place for students.

Nevertheless, attendance improvement efforts are an important first step in preventing student disengagement. These efforts set up the expectancy that all students participate daily in the school activities. In a way, these efforts welcome students back to school and convey the message that they are wanted. The ultimate goal is to have all students feel as though they are active, contributing members to the school culture. To achieve this goal, the efforts must be nonpunitive: punishment will alienate students; positive reinforcement will simply encourage improved attendance. Attendance monitoring is a way to express caring and efforts to monitor attendance should be communicated in this fashion to students.

The range of strategies has not been exhausted in this discussion. Some schools make wake-up calls to students. Other schools provide improved transportation services. Yet others have staff counsel students on an individual basis to address and resolve the issue of erratic attendance. The total community can and should be involved in improving attendance (e.g., the block club, local stores, the police department, and judicial system). All activities serve to heighten the responsiveness of schools to student absence.

CHAPTER 6

PROVIDING ALTERNATIVE SCHOOL SCHEDULES

In addition to having students become more conscious of how they use time in school through efforts at attendance improvement, schools also need to become more aware of how they organize time. Schools can be more responsive to student needs if schools are more flexible about time. Often youth who drop out do so largely because the school schedule does not match their own schedules. Time allotted for work may interfere with the demands of school. For youth who find jobs more satisfying than school, the lure of a job may be enough to prompt the decision to drop out of school. Work-related reasons for leaving school are cited by 21 percent of the young men and 9 percent of the young women (Morgan 1984). If students are employed up to 14 hours a week, there is little effect on their academic performance. But working from 15 to 21 hours a week increases the dropout rate by 50 percent; 22 hours or more increases the risk by 100 percent (Barro 1984).

Other students, especially young women, will choose to form a family over school attendance. Most female dropouts indicate pregnancy or marital plans as their reason for dropping out. Eighty percent of mothers under age 17 never finish high school and "more than one-third of white female dropouts indicate marriage played a role in their decision to leave school" (McDill et al. 1986). Many young women still have a constricted view of their future. They see their options as restricted to home and marriage, so school has little place in the scheme of their life. Raising a family or being married puts demands on them that may interfere with schooling.

To respond to the needs of at-risk youth, administrators can look at ways to make high school programs more flexible so that youth can stay in school while also meeting family or job responsibilities. Possibilities for flexible scheduling include extending school hours into the evening, using flextime for students and staff, creating more summer programs, and having an "open-entry, open-exit" policy. If students want or need (out of economic duress) full-time employment, schools can keep them in school by offering weekend and evening courses and extending the amount of time allowed to graduate (e.g., 5 years instead of 4).

The increased responsiveness of schools to the time demands of students makes the school a more supportive environment for them. Students are better able to participate in school because it does not conflict with the fulfillment of their other life roles. The school's points of entry are open, and there is an easier flow of students in and out of the high school.

Full-time, year-round schools are more accessible not only to students but to all community members. Such an influx will serve to invigorate the school atmosphere. The Governors' Task Force on education of the National Governors' Association has proposed that schools be turned into community hubs, open all day and year round. The governors stated that schools are "used only five days a week, nine months a year, and are restricted to the formal education of people between the ages of 5 and 18. This makes no sense to us" (quoted in the *ASCD Update* 1986). The governors recommended expanding the services provided by school. Schools can be used for adult education, after-school tutoring, day care, and other community activities.

A year-round calendar has other benefits, as well. This calendar may alleviate the need to build more facilities during times of temporary enrollment increases.

Educators have also determined that academic performance improves when vacation periods away from formal instruction are shortened (*ASCD Update* 1986). Learning losses are especially severe for at-risk youth over the summer months, presumably because they don't receive the intellectual stimulation outside of school that their more privileged peers receive (Report on Education Research 1987).

Buena Vista (Va.) City Public Schools offer students the opportunity to go to school year-round. Students attend for three quarters and then have the option to extend their studies in a fourth quarter. Fifty-nine percent of the students take advantage of the option (47 percent for enrichment, 43 percent for remediation, 9 percent for promotion, and 1 percent for acceleration). The four-quarter system, according to Superintendent James Bradford, Jr., has "improved teacher and student attendance, enabled students to enrich their curriculums, and brought the dropout rate from above the state average to well below it." Bradford stated that the cost is minimal: it costs about another $100 per child for the extra quarter (*ASCD Update* 1986).

The employment of more flexible variations in the use of time applies not only to the school day and year, but also to the classroom period. Some programs for at-risk youth devote larger blocks of time than the usual 45 minutes to certain core areas. Lengthened class periods allow for more substantial treatment of material, more time to address recurring problems in instruction, and more individualized attention. Students' educational experiences seem less fragmented if they are given a larger chunk of time to practice skills and assimilate knowledge. Further, students develop more of an attachment to their peers and teachers when they are with them for prolonged periods. Some have argued (e.g., Goodlad 1984) that such an arrangement of class time accounts for the effectiveness of elementary schools.

In summary, time may be structured in alternate ways to increase the holding power of schools. To respond to the needs of at-risk youth, to become more accessible to the community, and to offer more educational opportunities for all students, schools will need to be less rigid about the time at which students enter and exit school and, at the same time, expand the opportunities for engaging in educational activities by keeping school open at all times. The following discussion will highlight some practices that seek to use time more flexibly in school. The discussion will focus on the following four areas:

1. Continuation high schools and the adoption of an "open-entry, open-exit" policy

2. The expanded use of summer programs (especially those integrating academic learning and work experience)

3. Full-time schools with an extended school day

4. Lengthened class periods to allow for more intensive treatment (especially in the area of basic skills remediation)

Structuring time more fluidly will make possible flextime for both students and teachers. It will also encourage the involvement of guest lecturers and tutors from the community. There will be more time for enriched learning activities. In general, the school will be enlivened.

Continuous High School

One of the most open-ended models of secondary education in terms of time usage is the continuous high school model. A program in Fullerton, California, called the Alternative and Continuing Education Program, offers opportunities for students to finish their high school education at their own pace and consistent with their life roles. For example, students with daytime jobs can complete their high school diploma through independent study contracts. "Opportunity Classes" are available for students who have missed a great number of days in the quarter but are ready, mid-quarter, to start anew. Class schedules at this high school run from early morning to late evening to accommodate special needs (Association of California Urban School Districts 1985).

Another program is located in San Jose, California. The Center for Employment Training is an alternative high school that provides training in 17 different skill areas. All instruction is competency-based, which permits students to begin at their own level and advance at their own rate. Students can enter and exit as needed, since they always know where to start again. All occupational and academic programs are conducted on an open-entry/open-exit basis (Association of California Urban School Districts 1985).

Competency-based programs with an open-entry/open-exit policy are particularly effective programs for a student population that is transient. Schools with a large number of transfers may want to consider having a "school-within-a-school" based on core competencies for those students with basic skills deficiencies. This program may address the students' needs for individualized instruction. Counseling should also be provided to aid the student in making a transitions.

Continuation high schools make it possible for a student to continue an education at any point in time. Some schools achieve continuity in education for these students by using competency-based curricula; others arrange for students to do independent study. These arrangements are especially attractive to students who have heavy family or job responsibilities. They also accommodate better those students who proceed at a different pace than the pace in most classrooms. Thus, the provision of these more flexible arrangements can increase the holding power of schools.

Year-Round Schools

An extension of the idea that schools wanting to retain more students should allow students the opportunity to enter at any point, as in continuation programs, is the notion that they should also have the opportunity to go year-round. Boyer (1983) has commented that the 3-month summer recess of American schools is an anachronism. He states: "Our present school year was organized to fit an agrarian society. Children were asked to attend between 'crop time' and 'seed time,' those few months from fall to early spring" (p. 230). Other developed countries have much longer school years. The school year of the Soviet Union, East Germany, the People's Republic of China, and Japan average 240 days with a 5 1/2- or 6-day week and a school day of 6 to 8 hours. The long recess of American schools can be detrimental to achieving continuity in one's education, especially for at-risk youth.

One program in Bridgeport, Connecticut, attempts to help students achieve this continuity by providing a better articulation between summer and in-school academic programs. The Jobs for Connecticut Youth Liaison is a year-round program that coordinates services and opens access to programs. A staff person works for three high

schools to provide vocational assessment and counseling, referral to services, and advocacy. The youth served are those that participate in Job Training Partnership Act summer programs. The remediation and career education serve to give more focus to the students' summer experiences in JTPA. This articulation maintains academic and social gains made in the in-school academic program and the summer program (Connecticut State Board of Education 1987).

Creating and enlarging summer programs make it possible to provide educational services year round. JTPA summer programs have proven to be a valuable resource for schools in addressing the need of at-risk youth. During the summer, most students lose ground in the academic progress gained during the school year. However, for disadvantaged students, the loss is much greater and the time needed to regain skills is much longer. Public/Private Ventures, a Philadelphia-based nonprofit organization, has recently evaluated the effectiveness of a program designed to prevent learning loss among at-risk youth during the summer. The Summer Training and Education Program (STEP) has been instituted in Boston, Portland, Seattle, San Diego, and Fresno. STEP participants combined study and work. In addition to their part-time jobs, they underwent 90 hours of group and individual instruction in math and reading. They also had 18 hours of life skills instruction that included discussion of social and sexual responsibility. The results of the evaluation were dramatic. Non-STEP students lost a full grade in reading and a half grade in math. STEP students lost only about a quarter grade in reading and gained a quarter grade in math. Clearly, forging links between work and school over the summer helps to prevent learning loss. The combination of summer employment, basic education, and life planning offered by STEP programs also increased the likelihood of grade promotion. Educators need to think of better ways to use the summers if they want to increase the holding power of schools and better serve at-risk youth (Report on Education Research 1987).

To further support this notion, the Chicago Public High Schools studied the impact of attendance rates at summer schools on the dropout rate. The Chicago Board of Education found that Chicago high school students who went to summer school to make up failed courses dropped out at half the rate of those who did not attend summer classes. The opportunity to earn credits gives credit deficient students hope to graduate on time. Chicago's free summer program of 1985 was funded through a federal grant to the state aimed at disadvantaged youngsters (*Chicago Sun Times* 27 July, 1986).

Of course, the flexibility in the use of time provided by stronger and expanded summer programs and year-round educational opportunities may enrich the education of all students, disadvantaged or not. This expanded use also makes the schools more accessible to members of the community. These qualities, accessibility to the community and better accommodation to student needs, are consistent with and reinforcing of the qualities of an integrated learning environment (ILE), interconnectedness and openness. School reforms aimed at holding more students should heighten these qualities in the school program. Schools would then support a stream of educational experiences with continuity for students through enhanced summer programs. Community members would be better able to participate actively in school activities throughout the year and, particularly, in contributing resources to summer programs. Students would feel that their education makes more sense simply because more time is allotted to permit sense to emerge out of diverse learning activities.

Full-Time Schools

The continuous high school liberalizes the use of time; the year-round school expands the use of time. Another way to expand the use of time is to have full-time schools. Full-time schools offer educational activities beyond the regular school day. North Education Center in Columbus, Ohio, an alternative high school for potential dropouts and dropouts, is open from 7:30 a.m. to 9:30 p.m. to permit students to take care of job and family responsibilities. Courses are also 7 1/2 weeks long with 1 1/2- to 2-hour classes so that students can progress more quickly toward a high school diploma. One benefit of summer and evening classes is that students can accelerate their performance in order to catch up. Predictably, these classes increase the retentive power of schools (U.S. GAO 1987).

Louisville, Kentucky, has also responded to the dropout problem by setting up the Jefferson County Night High School. The Night High School is designed to be flexible, with classes available all day. The school day is divided into three blocks of time. Once again, students are given greater access to educational resources and therefore will be less likely to drop out (NFIE 1986).

Making schools more accessible by keeping school buildings open during the evenings and on weekends will have additional positive results, especially in inner city neighborhoods. The Institute for Educational Leadership (1987) suggests that a full-time school will no longer be perceived as "an isolated, besieged garrison" but rather as "a concerned community institution." Furthermore, they state, "Students, who now view their schools as punitive lock-ups, might begin to view them as caring, engaged, and supportive institutions." A full-time school is a school that can be more a part of the affairs of the community, in addition to better accommodating the schedules of students.

Extended Classroom Periods

An open-entry/open-exit policy liberalizes the use of time. Full-time, year-round schools expand the amount of time for instruction. Extending classroom periods is yet another flexible variation in the use of time that may better match student needs. Educators can increase opportunities for learning not only by lengthening the school day and school year but also by lengthening the classroom period. A solid block of time devoted to a particular subject or mastery of a skill intensifies instruction. To study a subject for a 2 1/2-hour period permits "greater depth and more serious contemplation than 5 short, fragmented sessions can provide" (Boyer 1983, p. 232). A lengthened class period gives the teacher time to provide students with the individualized attention they may need and allows students to complete projects of an experiential nature, engage in extended discussion of issues, and pursue cooperative endeavors with other students. More exciting instructional approaches are made possible than the usual lecture format.

A more intensive treatment of areas of knowledge and clusters of skills, while beneficial to all students, is especially important for the at-risk student. A few model dropout prevention programs stress streamlined instruction and a shorter school day (California State Department of Education 1986). In these programs, academic courses are compressed into a morning schedule so that students can get work experience in the afternoon. The morning class may last 1 1/2-hours and focus on such essentials as math and language skills. It is best, of course, when what is learned in the morning is used in the work of the afternoon. Tasks associated with the job should

have educational value derived from embedding basic skills in the task performance. For example, a student in a work-study program should be made to see the connection between her work in retailing and the math that she does in the morning. Time should be allotted during the school day to make an explicit effort to link academic learning with hands-on experiences, otherwise valuable educational opportunities are missed (Dewey 1963).

Not only does the lengthened school period open more time for intensive basic skills remediation for at-risk students, it also allows all students more time to write essays, do projects and group work, complete experiments, perform involved vocational tasks, and have extended dialogue on issues. As a consequence, a deeper level of learning can occur.

Conclusion

School can be very frustrating for those who have a different pace, those who have heavy family and job responsibilities, those who learn in an experiential way, those who need more one-on-one interaction, and those whose problems in mastering material are best addressed through tutoring. If the school structure sustains this frustration, then an environment is created that depresses self-esteem. In its attempts to restructure the school to better match student needs, the school can explore alternate ways to organize time. A closer coordination of the school schedule with student schedules should help to alleviate students' frustrations. More active and full participation by all concerned is made possible, so that the school becomes a more integrated learning environment.

To achieve greater integration, schools can liberalize, expand, and intensify the schools' use of time. Some models for doing this include the continuous high school, year-round school, full-time school, and extended classroom period. The benefits of employing these models are many. The results include (1) better accommodation to student schedules, (2) more intensive treatment of topics and practice of skills, (3) opening up of entry into the school for both students and the community, (4) more time for individualized attention and personalized problem solving, and (5) a greater diversity of classroom activities. Thus, flexible variations in the use of time can better serve students, staff, and community members.

CHAPTER 7

EXAMINING SCHOOL POLICIES THAT AFFECT RETENTION

In an integrated learning environment, systematic efforts are made to have all members of the ILE participate actively. Setting up a rich set of opportunities for all students to make valuable contributions raises the self-esteem of students. The environment, then, enables students to follow their interests, develop their abilities, and have meaningful dialogue with others committed to learning. The ILE includes every student in its creation and re-creation.

The ILE, of course, is a picture of the utopian school. The stark reality is that certain students are not wanted in school and that some students are not actively supported in their efforts to continue school. The leaders of the school community, the school administrators, make clear the message, "You don't belong here," when they attempt to push out the troublesome student. At-risk students receive the message: after they drop out, most say "school wasn't for them." Rather than suggesting that schools failed them, they internalize the attitudes of school agents that the dropout "has the problem." That attitude is in striking contrast to the attitude expressed by Wehlage and Smith (1986): "Schools have a major responsibility to create conditions that respond constructively to youth who are burdened with problems and disadvantages that interfere with school success. . . . Many such youth now view school as contributing to their problems" (p. 5).

Schools can honestly explore ways that they discourage students from staying in school and make policy changes to encourage students to persevere until graduation. Rescinding "pushout" policies regarding grade retention, stringent academic requirements, and suspension will make it easier for students to continue. Providing students with support services will aid students in their attempts to obtain their high school diploma. The aid may incorporate targeting at-risk students, counseling students, and creating alternate settings or additional support services for students with special needs (e.g., the disaffected youth, the pregnant teen and teen parent, and the limited English-proficient student).

Presently, some schools seem to have an organizational commitment to ridding the school of its supposedly "difficult students." Many schools disproportionately discharge students at age 17, when it is legal to do so in many states. The Children's Defense Fund has found that at least 25 percent of all dropouts have been suspended before they dropped out. Another 20 percent were designated as "behavior problems" by their teachers. Most suspensions are for nonthreatening behavior and are largely ineffective in encouraging good discipline (I.E.L. 1987). Certain groups of students, already alienated by their minority status, are further alienated by the actions of the school. Blacks, for example, are suspended from high school three times as often as whites (Howe and Edelman 1985). Suspensions keep "undesirable" students out of class and alienate them from school; discharges complete the process by shutting out those students entirely.

Thus, these schools as institutions make a willful decision not to teach all children. Some schools have adopted the dubious practice of referring students who create class control problems to special education. Wehlage and Rutter (1984) report that one district suspended additional referrals because at then current rates, the entire pupil population would have been placed in special education within three years.

Of course, there are more subtle ways to push out students than by suspension or discharge. One way is simply not to provide the services at-risk groups may need to succeed in the school environment. These at-risk groups embrace limited English-proficient students, substance abusers, pregnant teen, disaffected youth, the handicapped, and innumerable others. These groups have life conditions that may seriously impede learning. Schools can help in developing support systems, using the resources of parents, community, and school, that ameliorate these students' adverse conditions. As such, the schools can become a locus where services are integrated and coordinated to develop a plan of action to stay in school for each at-risk student. This extra support, not now given in many schools, can help students remain until graduation.

A reaction to the dropout problem would be to rescind pushout policies; a proactive stance toward the dropout problem would be to assess the special needs of at-risk populations and connect students to a support system responsive to those needs. Both approaches are needed in order to increase the supportiveness of the school environment. All school policies and practices should be oriented to helping every student achieve the goal of completing a meaningful learning experience that spans across the high school career. This places such practices as attendance monitoring, outreach, and rewards in a constructive, growth-oriented perspective: although attendance improvement is important, failure to attend school should not be viewed as a rationale for pushing a student out, but rather as an indication of a problem that needs to be solved by the coordinated efforts of school, family, and community.

Two issues loom large in the question of the supportiveness of schools. One issue is that of pushout policies: the negative effects that grade retention, increased academic requirements, and suspension have on the holding power of schools. The second issue concerns targeting students with unique circumstances that make school completion difficult and providing support services that address those circumstances. These are the issues discussed in the remainder of this chapter.

Pushout Policies

Some school policies discourage, directly or indirectly, students from continuing in school. Such pushout policies and practices include grade retention, increased academic requirements, and suspension. Administrators, in particular, need to reexamine the wisdom of these policies.

Grade Retention

Grade retention, for instance, is a typical response to poor academic performance. Yet numerous studies indicate that retention exacerbates problems that students have in learning, depresses self-esteem and performance, and increases the likelihood of dropping out. Those students who are held back in elementary or junior high schools can be easily identified by school officials as already having difficulty in school and targeted for special attention (Hammack 1986).

The fact that overage students have great difficulty adapting to and succeeding in the school environment has been supported by research evidence. The Chicago Panel on Public School Finances (Hess and Lauber 1985) reported that a third of the students entering the 21 Chicago public schools with the highest dropout rates were overage. Another study found that if students are two grade levels behind, there is a 100 times

greater chance that they will drop out; if they are held back one grade, they are 50 times more likely to drop out. Yet another study concluded that retention in grade slows down the academic progress of students (I.E.L. 1985).

Problems consequent to grade retention are not only academic, though. Students who are retained also suffer a great blow to their self-esteem. The Chicago Panel in the same study mentioned above discovered that overage students with reading levels equal to or greater than their normal age peers, are 7 to 10 percent more likely to drop out. In fact, the good reader who is overage is more likely to drop out than the below-average reader who is the right age for her or his class (I.E.L. 1987). Any positive feelings that the student may have about good reading skills are evidently overwhelmed by the frustration and shame experienced from being held back. Given negative academic, social, and psychological consequences of grade retention, this practice should be considered the worst possible solution to inadequate student performance (I.E.L. 1985).

In the past, schools have responded to inadequate student performance by the social promotion of poor students. Social promotion, of course, is also an ill-advised response. High school students who have been passed on for convenience despite a lack of minimal competency are placed in classes where they cannot possibly achieve and they are then passed on to compete in a labor market that is demanding increasingly high levels of basic skills. Thus, grade retention and social promotion are unacceptable in terms of their consequences.

Careful monitoring of basic skills acquisition, active problem solving in regard to difficulties in learning basic skills, and intensive remediation given in response to poor test results are all school practices ensuring that every student can experience success. They abrogate the need for either grade retention or social promotion. The best response is preventive; every child in elementary school can achieve if basic skills mastery is carefully and systematically monitored and appropriate intervention is immediate and ongoing. If the educational system works early on, there will be no need for retaining students in grades.

Of course, currently the system doesn't work that way. So, high schools are confronted with a group of students who are overage. Overage students face a number of problems. They often are deficient in basic skills and, therefore, don't have the essential tools needed to meet the challenges of the classroom. In addition, overage students may consider student-teacher communication patterns, which in many ways resemble child-adult communication patterns, inappropriate for their age (Florida Department of Education 1986). Overage students may also find it difficult to relate to their younger classmates. The frustration and humiliation of being an overage student often overwhelms a desire to stay in school.

But high schools can generate alternatives for these overage students. West Queens High School in New York City has joined forces with La Guardia Community College to conduct the Middle College School program. High-risk students, many of whom are overage, are targeted at West Queens and then sent to the college campus, where there is a high school program. The idea motivating the program is that a 19-year-old high school sophomore will relate better to a 19-year-old college freshman than he or she will to a 15-year-old sophomore in high school. The program is effective: the dropout rate has been lowered from 55 percent to 10 percent in West Queens High School (U.S. GAO 1987).

Other high schools permit average students a chance to accelerate in summer programs. Some will promote a student and then allot time during the school year for intensive remediation so that the student may catch up to his or her same-age peers. Yet other schools may design alternate settings incorporating a restructured curriculum that is self-paced and competency-based. Such a curriculum renders inoperative the notion of a grade level and supplants it with an expected level of competency.

Admittedly, manipulation of grade retention policies in itself will have little impact on the dropout problem. Being overage is associated with indicators of other problems with school. Nevertheless, the evidence indicates that there are no positive effects resulting from grade retention (Hammack 1986), so that those other problems are best solved by more direct means. Schools need to be creative in generating strategies that will maintain standards of excellence and also achieve ideals of equity. The above suggestions about overage students are only a beginning. Implementing these and other strategies should help to make school less frustrating for these dropout-prone youth.

Increased Academic Requirements

Recently, there has been a controversy about the purpose of a high school education. Many state commissions have bemoaned the the quality of education that high school students are receiving and have asked local school districts to enforce higher academic standards for graduation. Critics of these state commissions agree with the recommendations to expect more from students, but at the same time they say that little attention has been given to students who need the most help, the at-risk students. These critics suggest that schools have high expectations for students, but that this be balanced by extra remedial support for at-risk students so that all can experience excellence (Hodgkinson 1985).

The current changes in academic standards may have both negative and positive consequences for at-risk students. Maintaining a higher demand level in the classroom by expecting students to learn more difficult subject matter and spend more time on homework will result in greater effort being made, more being achieved, and heightened attentiveness in class. But if the demand level is too high, many students with poor basic skills will become frustrated and resigned, especially if additional support is not given. The greater time required for academic work and classroom attendance may conflict with family and work pressures for at-risk students. If course offerings are largely restricted to a liberal arts core, already dissatisfied students will be further disaffected by limited options. Overall, the increased learning time, the academically rigorous curriculum, and the heightened achievement levels will push many marginal students into dropping out (McDill, Natriello, and Pallas 1986).

The ideal, then, is to propose recommendations that both raise academic standards and mitigate the dropout problem. On the one hand, educators need to have high expectations for students. Those students who are presented with challenging performance standards do devote more time and energy to learning. The literature is replete with examples of self-fulfilling prophecies operating in the classroom: if a teacher expects a great deal, the student will have higher levels of achievement than if the teacher had low expectations.

On the other hand, more rigorous academic standards may disenchant poor students, restrict curricular options, and increase the dropout rate. The new graduation requirements of many states could limit the choices that students have in planning

their curriculum. Those requirements may also deny those students who plan to enter the labor force upon high school graduation access to courses that promote their employability. An article entitled "A Population at Risk" has pointed out, "Students with limited ability in traditional academic subjects may have to face repeated failure with little opportunity to engage in the broad range of activities valued in adult society that might afford them some success and encourage them to redouble their efforts to master academic content" (McDill, Natriello, and Dallas 1986). In summary, to address the needs of all students, schools need to maintain and expand many avenues of success and also provide needed assistance for attaining adequate mastery of basic academic skills.

The challenge to schools is both to increase academic standards and to retain students. Students will drop out if the pressure to learn is not balanced by support. Such support may be given through peer tutoring, personal learning plans, and flexible scheduling. Teachers can use a richer set of learning activities to motivate students with diverse learning styles and can employ a wider variety of instructional strategies including applied learning of academic basic skills in the context of vocational education. A more detailed discussion of these instructional strategies and curricular changes will be given in subsequent chapters.

Making changes in the curriculum that embrace the needs, abilities, and interests of all students and employing strategies that engage a number of learning modes will invite the active participation of a larger group of students. The participation of all students in learning is, of course, a major goal of any truly integrated learning environment. Further, an integrated learning environment has an integrated curriculum, with academic learning vitally linked to the world of work and depth of understanding achieved by applying abstract concepts in concrete, problem-solving situations. In this context, vocational education no longer is opposed with academic education, but both are seen as enhancing each other.

Within this broader perspective, the teacher's dilemma of either simplifying courses so that low-achieving students can earn credit or maintaining standards so that top achievers will be challenged is resolved. Educators and policymakers can recognize that there are many paths that lead successfully to a goal vocational tasks can be learned that embed basic academic skills or basic academic skills can be used in practical contexts. Either way, one can address the needs of different students, enrich the learning environment, and teach the core academic curriculum.

The intended purpose of the school reform movement is to heighten a commitment to learning. The reformers feel that extending the amount of time spent in schools and making the core academic curriculum more rigorous will serve to make school a more serious endeavor for students. But there is a risk in the push for academic reform of restricting curricular options and reducing enriched learning opportunities. The lack of flexibility in students' programs may further alienate students already at-risk. Furthermore, a commitment to learning may be achieved for students through alternative instructional strategies and nontraditional curriculum. Educators can then both preserve the diversity of the curriculum and teach academic skills.

Out-of-School Suspension

In addition to grade retention and raised academic standards, suspension is another policy that pushes marginal students to drop out. Suspension is an ineffective disciplinary action that often further separates an already alienated youth from the

school. Suspension fails to address the underlying problems that resulted in the inappropriate behaviors and led to the suspension.

A number of school systems across the country, recognizing the inadequacy of suspension as an effective disciplinary practice, have developed alternatives to school suspension. Many have created in-house suspension programs to temporarily isolate disruptive students from the general student population. A teacher provides assistance to students in completing assignments provided by the regular classroom teachers. The New Bern-Craven County Schools have alternative learning centers (ALCs) in their secondary schools to provide an alternative to out-of-school suspension. The dropout prevention staff member who coordinates the ALC program in each school conducts group and individual counseling sessions on a daily basis to address the problems underlying the student's behavior (*New Bern-Craven County School News* March 1987).

The entire school climate benefits from the ALC because all students need a safe, quiet learning environment free from threats, harassment, and nonproductive noise. When disturbances occur in the classroom, students can be sent to the ALC in lieu of suspension. The number of school suspensions has been reduced by this program, and students who are disengaged from school (as revealed in their behavior) continue to keep full contact with the school and to remain engaged in the educational process (Association of California Urban School Districts 1985).

A broad-based approach to creating alternatives to suspension can be found in St. Petersburg, Florida. Project PASS (Positive Alternatives to Student Suspensions) is a demonstration project that has been implemented at The Euclid Center, an alternative educational program in St. Petersburg. The major activities of the PASS program include advising teachers and administrators of ways they can deal effectively with problematic adolescent behavior, providing affective education and personal development programs for students and teachers, managing time-out rooms where students discuss problems and complete lessons, giving individual and group counseling to students experiencing interpersonal difficulties, and counseling parents. "This program, approved by the Joint Dissemination Review Panel, also offers a "Student's School Survival Course" and "Home Survival Course" to help students cope more effectively with problems experienced at home and school. Project PASS makes a systematic and comprehensive effort to address the underlying dynamics of a student's maladaptive behavior. The focus of the effort is not to exclude a student from the school, but to support the student and teach more adaptive behavior (Florida Department of Education 1986).

Conclusion

Schools must become sensitive to the direct and indirect ways that they push marginal students out further to the margins. A healthy school climate is one where staff hold high expectations for students and students strive to realize their full potential. But it must be recognized that some students will need additional and more comprehensive help in achieving these goals. If they fail to achieve those goals, members of the school and community need to join with individual students in addressing the problems that impede their learning. Present responses to poor student achievement and behavior are counterproductive. School policies seem to reinforce these inadequate responses by state-level administrators and building-level principals to problems of the student. Without additional support, increased standards will restrict curricular options and raise the dropout rate; without opportunities for acceleration and early preventive efforts, grade retention will simply perpetuate a student's sense

of failure and reinforce resignation; and without concerted efforts to address root causes of problem behavior, suspension will continue to be an ineffective way of changing student behavior. Sensitivity to the problems that policies create or the problems that they fail to solve will increase staff's supportiveness of at-risk students.

Policies for Targeting At-Risk Students

The Benefits and Dangers of Targeting

Talk is often heard of the dropout problem. Some would say that this talk belies the complexity of the issue, which could actually be broken down into a number of problems. A corollary to this sentiment is that no actual solution exists to the dropout problem. The issue is, in fact, constituted by a complex web of factors and can be located at the intersection of diverse, at-risk populations. On a districtwide level, realistic efforts are aimed at formulating remedies that moderately lower the dropout rate and address some of the at-risk populations. Decisions about which at-risk populations to target for an extra level of support can be based on their number and the severity of their circumstances. On an individual level, the involved professional should not hope to save a particular student, but can make efforts to increase the likelihood of a student staying in school if certain conditions are created that support or engage him or her. Outcomes of dropout prevention efforts must be seen as probabilities, not certainties. However, the likelihood of dropping out is reduced when programs and services are designed to support certain at-risk groups to create a more integrated learning environment.

The ILE can be created at any level. The school as a whole may be an ILE, a program within the school may be an ILE, an alternative program outside the school or a classroom may be an ILE. The ideal, of course, is to have those involved in the school as a whole working together in the new and closer ways characteristic of the ILE. However, this may not be fully possible. In that case, a change agent concerned with the dropout problem may want to identify students whose circumstances make it difficult for them to complete their education and place them in a special program. This identification process should be used with care and sensitivity. Educators must be mindful that, in addition to creating an ILE, another guiding principle of any dropout prevention effort is to raise the self-esteem of students. Hence, if targeting is used to separate certain students from the learning environment and communicate to them, albeit tacitly, that they don't belong in that environment, then targeting will only serve to increase feelings of alienation. If the student is separated from the school as a whole as a result of targeting, educators should take care to place that student in an environment where he or she feels a great sense of belongingness and camaraderie. Professionals in charge of such programs must make efforts to generate pride in the uniqueness of the program and point out the contributions the program makes to the school as a whole. Thus, a student in such an environment will feel connected to others in a useful endeavor that, in turn, will serve to raise the student's self-esteem.

Targeting is a frequently used strategy among educators. It has a number of advantages. A local needs assessment can be done to determine the sets of indicators best describing the populations whose circumstances increase the likelihood that they will drop out. If the design of programs and the provision of support services are based on this needs assessment, then the school's or district's dropout prevention

effort will be relatively comprehensive in covering needs, highly responsive to the problems of students, and effective in allocating scarce resources wisely. Advances in technology make identifying at-risk students convenient. Thus, targeting may lead to the most cost-effective and the most productive way of dealing with the dropout problem. Providing support services that address the needs of identifiable populations also renders those efforts capable of evaluation. An evaluation can systematically track and measure the success of the target population of students.

A local needs assessment has the further benefit of tailoring efforts to local conditions. The nature of the response to the dropout problem will depend on what outcomes the school desires and the nature and extent of the at-risk populations in the local school or district. Of course, the context-bound nature of the dropout problem precludes the possibility of designing a model program that can be imposed on schools across the nation, so change agents must generate strategies tailored to the peculiar conditions of their school and student population.

By doing a local needs assessment, a monolithic dropout problem can be broken up into smaller, more manageable sub-problems possessed by different groups. Planners can turn their attention to solving those subproblems. The Dallas school district has found some major at-risk groups to be overage students, pregnant teens, and the economically disadvantaged. The district proceeded to develop programs for each group that they identified.

This programmatic approach has a great deal of utility. Obviously, one way to provide the extra level of support a certain at-risk population may need is to design a program specific to its needs. This approach is especially appropriate for schools with a relatively homogeneous at-risk population or populations. Schools with such populations may be able to create programs with a positive climate characterized by an esprit de corps and pride.

However, this programmatic approach can have drawbacks. The heterogeneity of the at-risk population may be too great to make any sound generalizations and develop an agenda for a single "pull-out" program. Staffing and administering a separate program may be a greater expenditure than is needed to serve an at-risk group. For example, the establishment of in-school child-care services may be more economical than starting an autonomous alternative high school for parents attending high school. Students pulled out of their regular school environment may feel stigmatized. Teachers working within these pull-out programs may feel stigmatized themselves and may also develop low expectations for their students. Thus, a programmatic effort may be a force in disintegrating the school by splitting up the school into groups or tracks, some admired and others stigmatized.

The programmatic approach is based on a medical model. Within this model, student difficulty is seen as pathology. Students with "dropoutitis" manifest certain symptoms.

In many circumstances, and for many reasons, this medical model is neither applicable nor appropriate. First, the medical model locates the cause of dropping out as being strictly within the individual. Actually, the problem is a result of an interaction of both personal variables and environmental factors. The problem needs to be solved by manipulating these dual aspects.

Second, the model assumes that casualty is linear and mono-causal. Generally, the final act of dropping out is preceded by a gradual and steady accumulation of

frustrations in school, with the actual precipitating event ("the last straw") being only tangential to the causal chain of events. But not all causes are long-standing: some students drop out because of pregnancy, family breakup, drug abuse, or personal trauma. All of these conditions are unlikely to be predicted by an early identification process (Wehlage and Smith 1986). Further, there are, of course, many different reasons and combinations of reasons that prompt the decision to drop out. A related idea is that there are many ways to express dissatisfaction with the school ranging from acting out to withdrawing. Many students exhibiting these indicators do not drop out, and many who drop out do not possess these prior indicators. Diagnosis under these circumstances is a precarious affair. Some have even suggested that further research on the major characteristics of students who drop out is fruitless since individual characteristics have been found to have little predictive ability (Batsche 1985). The relationship of the variables that have been studied to the dropout problem is less than perfect, so that errors of prediction, both false positives and false negatives, are inevitable. Furthermore, a prediction of "no dropout" will usually be correct 75 percent of the time since the dropout rate rarely exceeds 25 percent. The exception would be in some urban areas, where randomness is approached at 50 percent (Quay and Allen 1982). The potential for misidentification and a consequent misappropriation of resources is great.

Finally, even if identification could be made accurately and diagnosis were an appropriate concept given the nature of the dropout problem, it could be that separating these "afflicted" students from others may be counterproductive or unnecessary. Separation may reinforce negative labeling, which may lower expectations for these students. This labeling may be especially pernicious if it is simply based on a student's membership in a group.

Dangers of stereotyping loom large. Membership in a particular group does not mean students will drop out. However, membership may often be correlated to circumstances that make school completion more challenging and, therefore, increase the likelihood of dropping out. For example, if a large number of students in a school can be characterized as urban black males, it will behoove change agents to realize that many of these students come from single-parent, female-headed household and are expected to be a source of income to the family and to help in raising younger siblings. This knowledge may lead change agents to help teachers modify their interactions with these students. Traditional student-teacher interactions are often inappropriate to the students' life roles. The knowledge is used not to stereotype but to understand; not to condemn a student on the basis of membership in a group, but to appreciate the needs of the group as a whole. There is a vast difference between negatively labeling a student simply because he or she belongs to a group and showing sensitivity to the needs of the group as a whole (and operating on that level of analysis) by providing specialized support structures that don't separate, stigmatize, or alienate that group from the rest of the school. "Separate can't be equal" is as true with at-risk populations as it is with minorities. If not planned with care and sensitivity, a programmatic approach may reinforce patterns of stereotyping.

A further limitation of the medical model and the programmatic approach it generates is that the model presumes a need for one-to-one matching of cause to effect, yet many successful interventions do not necessarily entail such a one-to-one matching. For example, factors outside the school's sphere of influence may be the most immediate factors having an impact on the student's decision to leave school, but the creation of a nurturing environment for this at-risk youth may enable him or her to cope with these problems and also stay in school. In fact, the creation of a supportive network for the student may be the most effective intervention, even though the student's

particular problem has not been **directly** addressed by a school-based intervention. For instance a student may be abused at home and consequently have difficulty concentrating in the traditional classroom setting, but the provision of a vocational education program integrating basic skills in its curriculum is a bright spot in the student's day that makes coping easier.

Much of the dropout literature seems to take the following view of the dropout problem. A group of students fails to adapt to the traditional school environment. They fail to adapt because they lack personality trait, X. Change agents may think, "They don't have X--that's why they can't fit in. Whatever is wrong with these students can be fixed by counseling or by being placed in special programs for at-risk youth." Consequently, many researchers have tried to solve for X. Again, a number of problems arise in this attempt:

1. There is so much variability in the at-risk population that accurate predictions about dropping out based on a set of characteristics cannot be made.

2. Other students have difficulties in school similar to those experienced by actual dropouts but they do not drop out.

3. The growing number of at-risk youth calls for a broad-based, systemic effort to keep students in school.

In fact, a focus on individual at-risk groups may keep change agents from looking at broader issues of systemic changes that are needed to help all marginal students by increasing the supportiveness of the school environment. Thus, by viewing the dropout problem at this level, change agents are motivated to extend and broaden the range of services accessible to all students. The focus becomes changing the school experience so that it is positive for students by, for example, creating different relationships between the adult and the student. Systemic change, however, does not necessarily exclude the possibility that at-risk groups may need specialized alternate programs as part of the concept of systemic change. Indeed, the concept includes the notion of offering a wider range of programs and support services from which students may choose (Wehlage and Smith 1986). Wehlage has suggested that, up to grade seven, educators need to work on providing students with the best elementary education that they can possibly receive without any notion of special interventions. Educators can concentrate on teaching reading, writing, and arithmetic up to the students' abilities. Additional support services can be provided through social workers and counselors when there are family problems.

But placing students in a separate program does not have to be stigmatizing and alienating for those students. Some special programs initially designed for at-risk students are now high-status programs to enter. For example, one school began a "media academy" for at-risk students that was intended to prepare them for careers in television and radio through coursework and an internship program. Soon, high ability students were also applying for entry into the program. This school's experience suggests that the focus of the program should not be remediation (or any weakness) but productive, "real-life" activities (that is, a focus on strengths). Another school in the Midwest has a program that serves Appalachian students with low reading ability. These students tend to be poor, and the coordinator of the program has found that many poor students with adequate reading skills want to enter the program because they feel more comfortable with their poor peers. The coordinator manages this diversity by having a competency-based program. The program has been successful. This program's

experience illustrates that common socioeconomic status background may be an even more important factor in creating social cohesion than a common academic skills level.

Factors that increase the cohesiveness of the school environment will reduce the dropout rate. What one gains in the efficiency of pull-out programs may be at the sacrifice of the school's cohesiveness as a whole. The programmatic approach often leads too easily to efforts and resources being scattered and militates against a holistic approach to students (e.g., a teen parent placed in an alternative program for teen parents, whose academic program focuses on basic skills, may be a high academic achiever). Finally, selective programs may unintentionally result in negative labeling, which may actually exacerbate the problems of students.

Given these drawbacks, pull-out programs generally are inadvisable. The ideal is to integrate school as a whole. But if the choice, given resources, attitudinal obstacles, and the nature of the school's student population, is between having an integrated pull-out program and the rest of the school integrated, or having the entire school not integrated, obviously having the two integrated learning environments is better. The decision, then, is between creation of an alternative (integrated) learning environments or restructuring the school as a whole as an ILE. The decision can be made on the basis of the following:

- The homogeneity or heterogeneity of the student population
- The willingness to change of staff, students, and community
- The degree of incompatibility between groups in the school
- The resources and leadership of the school
- The commitment from the entire community

But targeting does not necessarily entail separation of students. Targeting is not in itself especially problematic; rather it is the advisability of pull-out programs whose impetus can be the result of the targeting process that may be problematic. One can provide extra support, prompted by a targeting process, for at-risk groups without separating those students from other students. Targeting should not be done to construct a "profile," but to be aware of needed areas of support. So educators can use the knowledge of indicators correlated with dropping out to guide interventions other than programmatic efforts. The information may direct the provision of free-floating support services or a special block of class periods. To reiterate a point made earlier, the purpose of targeting should not be to separate students from an environment and communicate to them, "You don't belong." Rather, the purpose of targeting should be to provide the support necessary for these students to belong.

If students are selected for a specialized program, the meaning of that act will be reconstrued if its intent is to create in the chosen students a feeling that they belong, their participation is valued, and they have a contribution to make. Truly, intending that meaning may require a change in attitude among school personnel. Generally, school administrators see student diversity as a "problem" to be "managed" through tracking and pull-out programs. Student diversity could, alternatively, be regarded as a source of richness. The unique circumstances of students can be seen as a source of potentially unique contributions by those students to the school. For example, teen parents can be child care experts, teachers of family relations, and peer

counselors on the difficulties and general inadvisability of early parenting. The school could turn weaknesses into strengths by reconstruing "limitations" as a source of special insight and experience. Every student could be viewed in terms of strengths possessed and areas of growth to be pursued. As another example, learning disabled students could be called upon to be tutors to elementary school students. As a consequence, the bright/dumb or good/bad dichotomies so often found in the classroom, stripping students of their individuality, can be transcended. Schools can become a more humanized environment.

A balanced perspective is called for amidst the controversy surrounding the status of targeting. The problem is to reconcile a targeting process, which ensures the accountability of the school to diverse student circumstances, with the notion of an integrated learning environment, or ILE. The apparent conflict with an ILE occurs because, implicitly, one is considering a group singled out from the larger school community in targeting. But there is no difficulty with studying certain populations in the school and making sure that the school is being responsive to their problematic circumstances. However, there is glaring difficulty with pulling them out because they have these problems and treating them as if they should be separated from others, as if they are social pariahs. Programmatic efforts, the restructuring of the school, and an individualized team approach to helping particular students can all be done without any hint of stigmatism. Further, there's nothing wrong with knowing about and acting on the correlations between certain student characteristics and dropping out. But there is everything wrong with labeling students as "losers" because they possess a set of characteristics. The goal ultimately is to restructure the school environment in such a way that all students, in their great diversity, feel a part of the school, and this may include expanding alternative programs and special support services.

At-Risk Indicators

At-risk students face challenges in school, at home and work, and within themselves that make school completion more difficult than for students who don't face those challenges. Willis (1986) has given a comprehensive account of the challenges. Willis lists the populations that are at risk, details the life conditions that are correlated with educational risk, and describes behavioral indicators of being at-risk. At-risk populations are (1) poor students, especially those from female-headed households; (2) minorities; (3) limited English-proficient (LEP) students; (4) students from overcrowded, inner-city schools; (5) students whose families have been economically displaced by shifting industrial patterns, as in the Midwest; and (6) pregnant teenagers and teen parents.

These at-risk students have many problems. They include (1) low academic performance, (2) involvement with the juvenile justice system, (3) running away, (4) depression and suicide, (5) substance abuse, (6) early parenting, and (7) neglect and abuse. Some of the behavioral indicators that can serve as warning signals to educators are (1) poor attendance, (2) poor academic performance (an early indicator of educational risk), (3) lack of involvement in enrichment activities of the school, (4) antisocial behavior in and out of school, (5) negative attitude toward school, (6) lack of familial support and problems at home, (7) attachment to delinquent peer group, and (8) criminal activity.

Ekstrom et al. (1986) cites poor school performance and behavior problems as critical variables related to dropping out. These two factors had more of an effect than all others considered: race, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, family structure,

ability and attitudes, and home educational support system. The best indicator of low school performance is a low GPA. Other indicators are low scores on achievement tests and low educational aspirations. The dropout-prone students tend to avoid the academic curriculum and take more courses from the vocational or general curriculum according to self-report in the tenth grade. The dropout-prone feel little attachment to school. They spend less time doing extracurricular activities and more time "driving around and going on dates." They feel alienated from school and associate with peers who share their attitude toward school. The dropout-prone student is not interested in school, doesn't think the high school experience is valuable, and does not want to go on to college. The alienation the student feels in school frequently manifests itself in acting-out behavior or withdrawal. The dropout-prone student often cuts classes, is absent, needs to be disciplined and suspended or put on probation. Dropout-prone students find meaning in experiences outside of school. They are invested in forming a family or working full-time. The criticality of school performance and behavior problems reinforces Wehlage's assertion that: "It is not students' backgrounds but schools' response to students' backgrounds that determine success in school." This assertion suggests that attitudes or life conditions determining students' decisions about their schooling would be the best predictors. Indeed, Weber (1986) concluded in his study of dropout characteristics that "a multidimensional classification rule employing the following five variables--graduation plans, age (over 16 or 16 and under), times moved since 5th grade (affecting a student's attachment to school), introverted vs. outgoing, and plans regarding going to college--might be expected [from his data] to yield a reasonably high correct classification rate for individual students" (pp. 25-26). Many of the present efforts to identify dropout-prone students are based on SES, academic achievement, or attendance levels. Using these indicators results in inordinately large classification errors. They don't directly relate to the student's decision to continue or end schooling. But future plans, attachment to school, and locus of control were more directly related to this decision, so it is reasonable and verifiable that they are better predictors.

Students' attitudes and conditions that influence students' decisions about schooling are modifiable. Attachment to school can be heightened by increasing the supportiveness of school. Policies regarding retention can be changed to decrease the overage population. The school can provide students with opportunities to show initiative and experience success, which will increase their confidence and make them more outgoing. Intensive basic skills remediation can provide students with the tools that they need to see themselves as academically capable. This intervention may lead them to envisioning the possession of a high school diploma and pursuit of postsecondary education. In these ways and many more, the school can relate to students in a manner that enables and empowers them to make decisions about their future that indicate a commitment to lifelong learning.

In addition to studying student characteristics related to decisions about school, educators have examined individual schools and their retentive power. This approach is buttressed by the observation that schools in similar regions with similar students have significantly different student outcomes. Controlling for all other factors, the only factor that can account for the different student outcomes is a factor called "school effectiveness." Some schools are less than effective in retaining students. Schools do reject some students and contribute to providing negative school-based experiences that in turn lead to withdrawal from school (Novak and Dougherty 1986).

These negative contributions to students' experiences are highly correlated with dropping out. They include grade retention and disciplinary actions. The single best predictor of a student's dropping out is when that student is held back before the

eighth grade (I.E.L. 1985). An important correlate of dropping out is a student's being two or more grades behind grade level. In Chicago, a study found that dropouts have a much higher percentage of retention (59 percent) and were 13 years old or older at the end of sixth grade (Hess and Lauber 1985). Disciplinary actions taken against students are also significantly correlated to high dropout rates. Dropout-prone students often have an extended history of discipline problems, especially truancy, tardiness, suspensions, and absenteeism (Novak and Dougherty 1986). Researchers analyzing data from the Transition Project found that in addition to such factors as low classroom grades, grade failure, and negative school attitudes, delinquent behavior in the junior high school years was a powerful predictor of dropping out (Bachman, Green, and Wirtanen 1971).

The behavior problems of erratic or weak attendance, delinquency, class cutting, and tardiness are compounded by factors that affect academic performance in school. Academic records of dropout-prone students are marked with low grades and failed courses, which can serve as warning signs to educators. Students whose self-reported grades were "mostly Ds or below" had a 42.5 percent dropout rate, "mostly Cs," 18.5 percent, "mostly Bs," 8.1 percent, and "mostly As," 2.9 percent (NCES Bulletin 1983). Dropouts show lower verbal and mathematical abilities, as revealed by standardized achievement test results. In Chicago high schools that were in the upper third in dropout level, two out of every three students were two years behind in reading level (Hess and Lauber 1985). Their basic skills deficiencies impair their ability to succeed in the classroom.

School-related factors, of course, are not the only factors that impede the school functioning of at-risk students: a variety of family factors also make high school completion difficult. Dropout-prone students tend to have parents and older siblings who have themselves dropped out of school. An important correlate of dropping out is coming from a household where the father dropped out of school (Borus and Carpenter 1984). Officials in Detroit Public Schools have discovered that if a youngster has an older brother or sister who dropped out of school, then the chances of that student dropping out are very strong. The low educational attainment of parents and siblings seems to be indicative of a home that is not a supportive educational environment.

Further, demographic changes in family patterns portend the swelling of at-risk populations. Hodgkinson (1985) has warned: "What is coming toward the educational system is a group of children who will be poorer, more ethnically and linguistically diverse, and who will have more handicaps that will affect their learning" (p. 7). Recently there has been a rapid increase in the number of poor households headed by a female black or Hispanic. Ninety percent of the increase in children born into poverty is from these households. One out of every five school-age children now come from homes at or below the poverty line. At the same time, government spending for poor children during the past decade has declined. The number of "traditional" families has suffered a decrease also. In 1955, 60 percent of the households in the United States consisted of a working father, a homemaker mother, and two or more school-age children. In 1980, that family unit was only 11 percent of all homes, and in 1985, it was only 7 percent. The census indicates that 59 percent of the children born in 1983 will live with only one parent before reaching age 18. Borus and Carpenter (1984) found that coming from a household where the mother or father was not in the home when the youth was age 14 was an important correlate of dropping out. And there are more latchkey children. Of those mothers of one-year-olds, one-half have already returned to work. The weakening of the family will necessitate the strengthening of the school.

Although family factors don't have the predictive power of school-related factors, they do give educators insight into why many students are having trouble in school. Certainly, impoverished and frustrating life conditions will tend to depress self-esteem and increase the likelihood of substance abuse, depression, chronic unemployment, and low educational attainment. Overcoming such conditions can be a Herculean task, and those who find themselves in these conditions often feel trapped. Ekstrom et al. (1986) found that an externalized locus of control, or the feeling that one can do little to control one's destiny, was strongly correlated to dropping out. Further, lower levels of self-esteem have been identified in many studies of dropouts (Novak and Dougherty 1986).

The life conditions, and their psychological and sociological effects on individuals, will affect students' attitudes toward school. There is a lack of belief among many at-risk youth that the effort to graduate will be beneficial. The lack of positive self-concept that they often exhibit is partially due to, and certainly reinforced by, repeated failure in academic classes. This failure creates in them little sense of control over the academic environment. The process is cumulative: early negative experience with academic failures and discipline send negative messages to them and exacerbate problems. The negative experiences reinforce a child's poor self-concept and negative attitude and perception that school is not for them. If, in addition to the frustrations and tribulations experienced in school, they face impoverished conditions at home, the sense of hopelessness and despair may be overwhelming.

The futures envisioned by students from such backgrounds can only be constrained at best. The forces of racism and sexism exacerbate the negative consequences of dropping out and minimize the returns on graduating. The unemployment rate for black high school students who dropped out in 1981 was 71.4 percent; the rate for white dropouts, in contrast, was 29.2 percent. Graduating for blacks may increase employment prospects, but the inequities remain. Black high school graduates have higher unemployment rates (25.3 percent) than white males and females who drop out (21.2 percent). In fact, at every level of education, blacks and Hispanics have higher unemployment rates than white males. Gender inequities, as well as racial inequities, are reproduced in dropping out. Although 25 percent of all families headed by high school dropouts live below the poverty line, 49 percent of families headed by female dropouts live in poverty. Thus, dropping out is very often a symptom of an individual's economic and social difficulties--it becomes difficult to persevere if one realizes that inequities continue to exist, with or without a diploma. Furthermore, impoverished conditions limit resources to cope with stresses and also add to stress. These explanations may account for the significant (though not highly predictive or discriminating) correlation between both race and gender and the dropout rate (Fine and Rosenberg 1983).

An awareness of the difficulties confronting populations of students, distinguished by race, class, and gender, will sensitize educators to their needs. In forming a composite of their average dropout, Chicago schools found that overage males with minority backgrounds (black or Hispanic) and reading scores well below the average are the students most at risk of dropping out (Hess and Lauber 1985). Those schools with large social class differences within their student population have found corresponding differences in the dropout rate according to class. In one study, none of the students from the highest social class dropped out of high school, whereas 71.4 percent of the students from the lowest social class dropped out (Elliott, Voss, and Wendling 1966). For economically deprived students, paid employment, however menial and dead-end, is a factor that draws them away from school. Often poor students, with

their constricted views of the future, lack graduation plans involving extensive education, in any case. Paid employment and low educational aspirations, combined with little knowledge of the labor market (Borus and Carpenter 1984), are probably the factors accounting for the positive correlation between low SES and dropping out. Finally, gender differences are especially pertinent when considering the impact of family formation on school completion. Forty-four percent of female dropouts in the United States indicate pregnancy or marriage as their main reason for dropping out (Fine 1986). Although the rate of pregnancy has declined 11 percent from 1974 to 1983, apparently due to improved sex education and greater access to family planning resources (Elster, Lamb, Tarare, and Ralston 1987), the current rate of 8 percent of teenage girls becoming pregnant still makes it a problematic issue in terms of school completion. Being pregnant is an important correlate of dropping out (Borus and Carpenter 1984). From these statistics, it can be seen that race, class, and gender inequities create much of the context of the dropout problem.

There are, of course, other student situations, not directly related to gender, class, or race, that put a student at risk of not completing high school. One at-risk population, which is growing in size, is the Hispanic population. The number of Hispanics, the nation's fastest-growing minority, has risen 30 percent from 1980 to 1987. Hispanic students from Spanish-speaking homes often have trouble mastering English, which obviously impairs academic performance and increases the likelihood of dropping out. Fifty-one percent of Hispanics completed high school, according to a 1987 survey by the Census Bureau, which is well below the 77 percent of non-Hispanics with high school diplomas (*Columbus Dispatch* September 1987).

Schools can strive to relate better to unique or problematic student situations. Students can face problems at home, within themselves, in school itself, and at work that impair their school functioning. The alienation brought about by their marginal circumstances may make them feel disconnected from school. The lack of connectedness with the school may be apparent in at-risk students' low participation in extracurricular activities and failure to personally identify with a teacher or other adult. Many dropout-prone students, consequently, do not feel that they belong and do not feel comfortable in school (Novak and Dougherty 1986). This leads to higher subjective perceptions among the dropout-prone that school is not for them. Ekstrom et al. (1986) report that the reasons most frequently cited by dropouts for dropping out were that "school was not for me" (33 percent) and poor grades (33 percent). Fifteen percent said the reason was that they couldn't get along with teachers and 19 percent reported that they preferred to work (11 percent said they needed to work to support their family and 10 percent said they needed or wanted to start a family, i.e., left due to pregnancy). In developing support services for at-risk students, change agents should keep in mind dropouts' self-reports of their reasons for leaving. They give insight into the life conditions that reduce the likelihood of high school completion.

Targeting Practices

A number of targeting practices take advantage of the knowledge that certain indicators are associated with being at risk. Many schools have developed a checklist of at-risk characteristics for teachers, counselors, and administrators that can be used in assessing the probability of a student dropping out of school. School districts throughout Florida have, with the encouragement and support of the Florida Department of Education, developed potential dropout profiles for their own districts. The Panhandle Area Education Cooperative (PAEC), asked guidance counselors to identify the characteristics of actual dropouts, and then compiled the most common

characteristics into a list. A computer database was developed that included potential dropout identifiers that became part of a student's permanent record. Guidance counselors are given reports of high school students who exhibit high risk characteristics. Counselors then help in planning appropriate interventions to keep these students in school (Florida Department of Education 1986).

Emphasis is often placed on early identification in any comprehensive dropout prevention effort. From the perspective of the high school, identification should occur before the student makes a transition into high school, so that efforts can be made to give these at-risk students extra support in making this difficult transition and linkages to support services and special programming are targeted to those most in need. The intention of such early identification should not be to label and track, but rather to improve education for all and expand the range of support services.

Early identification has been greatly facilitated by computer technology. Dale Mann (1986a) has suggested two uses for computers in dropout prevention--instructional management and identification. Computers can keep track of those multiple impacts that push out students. Computers can "red flag" high risk students in order to alert professionals before they reach a danger point. The Denver public school system has used computers to develop a systematic way to help high school personnel identify dropouts. Four specific predictor variables were defined for the school around which a computer program would be written. These were grade point average (GPA), percent absence (A), number of suspensions (S), and results of competency tests taken first in ninth grade in reading, mathematics, language usage, and spelling (PAR). The four predictor variables, GPA, A, S, and PAR scores, are flagged if they fall below a set level, and the flags are printed opposite the student's name and a report sent to the counselor. The levels at which these predictor variables are set can be adjusted up or down to obtain a large sample of students to be screened in the future or a small sample to provide a group of more probable dropouts ("Catch a Falling Star" 1986).

Support Service Policies

There are some groups of students who, due to certain characteristics and circumstances, have difficulty succeeding in the traditional school environment. These students need an extra level of support to be able to participate actively as members of a learning community. To identify these groups will be a step toward increased sensitivity to their unique needs. If schools enlarge the range of their services, either through networking or school-based efforts, they can make the school experience valuable for others who have additional or alternative life experiences and needs compared to the advantaged (e.g., early marriage, parenting, full-time employment, poverty background, experiential learning style, lack of involved significant other). Schools must match student needs to school services. Currently, the requirements of school may even conflict with or frustrate the fulfillment of other needs, such as parenting, acceptance, a sense of mastery and competence, and time to satisfy job demands. Further, the institution of increased academic standards may serve to exacerbate this problem. Schools must provide the level and type of support necessary for special populations.

Specialized support structures can provide services that improve self-esteem, address personal and family problems, and assist in establishing personal goals. Expansion of in-school services may include day care for infants of teen parents, extended day programs for working students, and school-based health clinics. Although these may not seem to be traditional functions of the school, these services meet needs

that might otherwise interfere with full school participation (I.E.L. 1986). Cities in Schools (CIS) was begun in Atlanta in 1974 by Exodus, Inc., to test this very concept. The staff of CIS found that many potential dropouts would stay in school if they could receive **both** education and social service support at the school site. The services are delivered in a coordinated fashion to students through personal relationships with caring adults. Evidently, combining education and social support re-creates relationships and environments in the school in such a way that the marginal become the involved. CIS is a model that has been implemented across the country.

The CIS model operates on the philosophy that solutions to the dropout problem require structures that link work, learning, counseling, day care, and other support services (Hargroves 1986). The validity of this philosophy is bolstered by the fact that many institutions (the legal system, school, family, community agencies, businesses) have a causal role in the dropout problem, so many institutions must be involved in the solution. In addition, the research findings of Ekstrom et al. (1986) prompt them to make the following recommendation:

> No single program or policy can meet the needs of the diverse dropout population. Three major types of programs are needed: (1) programs to help pregnant teenagers remain in school; (2) programs to help youth with economic needs combine work and education; and (3) programs directed toward students who perform poorly because they are dissatisfied with the school environment. (p. 371)

Indeed, the bulk of programs or efforts that are targeted at particular populations are directed at pregnant or parent teens, limited English-proficient students, substance-abusing students, handicapped students, the economically disadvantaged, and certain minority groups. Other targeted programs are designed for children of migrant workers, the learning disabled, and the disaffected.

Pregnant or Parent Teens

Educators, and the nation as a whole, have become increasingly concerned about the unmet needs of pregnant students and teen parents. Each year more than a million American teenagers become pregnant, and four out of five of them drop out of high school. Almost 50 percent of female students drop out for the purpose of forming a family (I.E.L. 1987). Apparently, pregnant and parenting teens need additional support to stay in school.

The causal connection between pregnancy and school leaving and the common factors of becoming pregnant and dropping out of high school are difficult to unravel. But the effort to assess these factors will give insight into ways that change agents can create environments that raise their self-esteem. Those who have worked with teen parents have observed indications of their low self-esteem. A worker at Crittenton Center, a program in Los Angeles for parent teens, recounts: "The girls tell me, 'Before I was pregnant, I was nothing. Now I am somebody. I'm a mother" (*Time* 9 December 1985). For these students, pregnancy is an escape from failure and frustration; a way finally and successfully to assume an adult role and feel important. Berryman (1986) has stated, "The girl who becomes the teenage mother, although we hear a great deal about her 'wanting someone to love,' is more fundamentally taking the action that lets her occupy the niche of 'mother,' a place in the adult firmament that best fits how **she** sees her talents and opportunities" (p. 6). Having a baby at least offers the teen a full-time job and a sense of purpose and competence. Thus, the

pregnant teen's low self-esteem prompts her to consider only a narrow future for herself, a bleak future best expressed by a condition of being kept "barefoot and pregnant." In 1957, when the teenage birth rate was actually higher than it is today, being in this condition was suited to that time. Now, societal attitudes both allow and expect women to assume a larger range of roles, and assuming these roles requires a higher educational attainment.

Thus, these students need to consider brighter futures for themselves. Recognizing this, Janice Anderson, a successful black businesswoman from Milwaukee, started a volunteer program called "Reach for the Stars" that pairs inner-city adolescents with role models who are black professional women (*Time* 9 December 1985). Many programs for teen parents provide training in salable skills and job placement services in order to create alternatives to raising self-esteem, other than having another baby. Programs also need to interest parent teens in nontraditional jobs and provide for career planning. When these students have a career goal, they are unlikely to become pregnant again. A positive future orientation is the best prevention.

Aside from raising self-esteem and creating an expanded sense of future, more immediate concerns need to be addressed. If students are parents or are pregnant, they will benefit from a program that offers day care and transportation, includes a curriculum that incorporates child development and parenting skills, and provides accessible and comprehensive health care services. Parent teens often find the juggling of school and child rearing nearly impossible. Schools can connect with other community agencies to expand possibilities for child-care arrangements. In El Paso, for example, the school district contracts with the local YWCA to provide child care both in and out of school.

School can also use materials from Planned Parenthood and the national YCA to encourage contraception and responsible postponement of parenting . Such a measure can prevent nonparent teens from becoming pregnant and keep parent teens from repeating pregnancy. In one study, 67 percent of teens who got pregnant and then married were pregnant again within 26 months and only 39 percent of pregnant teens who did not marry had a second pregnancy. Needless to say, a teen parent of two children fares worse educationally and economically than a teen parent of one child. The high rate of repeat pregnancy points up the need for effective sex education and, even more vital, the ready availability of contraception (Fine 1986). Indeed, one researcher from the Center for Population Options, Douglas Kirby, found that sex education programs, by themselves, do not significantly affect the habits of teens, but these programs, when coupled with an effort to help teenagers obtain contraceptives, result in sharp drops in the pregnancy rate (*Time* 9 December 1985).

On-site school-based health clinics, as controversial as they are, have been evaluated as effective in reducing the pregnancy rate. Mechanic Arts High School has served as the model for other programs throughout the country. This high school's health clinic advised teenagers on contraception and dispensed prescriptions for birth control devices, as long as parents had agreed to allow their children to go to the clinic. The results were dramatic and account for the widespread adoption of the model. Between 1977 and 1984, births to female students fell from 59 per thousand to 26 per thousand. And girls who did become pregnant also benefited from the counseling. Their dropout rate fell from 45 percent to 10 percent and only 1 percent had a second pregnancy within two years of the first (*Time* 9 December 1985).

Even if the adoption of school-based clinics is not feasible due to vocal and intransigent community opposition, the effectiveness of these programs points up the

importance of connecting students with out-of-school family planning resources and cautioning students about potential dangers of sexual precocity. Ironically, the attitude that motivates some community members to oppose family planning is the same attitude that promotes pregnancy among teens. Both teens who are likely to become pregnant and these community members feel that suggesting the use of contraception translates into promoting promiscuity. To the mind of the teen likely to become pregnant, using contraception is tantamount to planning for sex and only "whores" plan for sex. On the other hand, if one is swept away by passion and accordingly unprepared, then this is understandable and romantic (Gordon and Everley n.d.). This insight is reinforced by the Swedish experience, where teenagers are sexually active even earlier than they are in the U.S. and exposed to even more sexually explicit television. Despite the greater sexual activity among their teenagers, the pregnancy rate is almost three times less than the rate in the United States. The Alan Guttmacher Institute (1986) attributes this to the curriculum in Sweden, which ensures that every child by age 12 has been introduced to the various types of contraceptives and their use (*Time* 9 December 1985).

Sol Gordon, a psychologist from Syracuse University, has developed curriculum materials that address the sensitive issues of adolescent sexuality. These materials are pervaded by a philosophy, largely acceptable to mainstream Americans, that having intercourse as a teenager is unwise. Most teenagers are not psychologically prepared for the experience and the health hazards are too great. But if teenagers do choose to have intercourse (and a large number make this choice--a 1982 Johns Hopkins survey indicates that one out of five 15-year-old young women have already had intercourse), they need to know how to use contraception and also have easy access to contraceptives. And attention needs to be directed to young men as well as young women. Sexually active teenage boys need to be sensitized to the demands of fatherhood and taught methods of pregnancy prevention. Thus, a dual message is conveyed to teenagers: "You're not ready to sexualize your relationships, but if you do, take precautions." Although this may seem contradictory, parents confront similar situations as a matter of course: for example, parents tell their adolescents not to drink and drive, but offer them a ride home if they do. Schools can similarly support those who have made mistakes without implicitly condoning those mistakes. (Gordon and Everley n.d.).

The goals, then, of any effective support service structure for pregnant or parent teens are (1) provision of education about relationships, sexuality, contraception, child development, and health issues surrounding pregnancy, birth, and post-partum condition; (2) coordination of health care services; and (3) insurance of access to family planning resources. In addition, parenting skills can be taught experientially by placement of students in day care settings; transportation can be provided to and from school and health care facilities; and school achievement and progress can be maintained by letting them make up work missed. Job training and placement ensures independence and wider opportunities. Achieving these goals will raise the self-confidence of participants in the programs and increase the chances of future success.

Florida's efforts to help teen parents are representative of programs that encompass these goals. The Florida Department of Education mentions the following four possible program delivery options:

1. Special centers that one attends during pregnancy and, if child care is available, for up to a year after delivery

2. School within a school programs that are self-contained centers housed in regular secondary schools, but providing specialized courses (e.g., parenting skills, prenatal care)

3. School-based programs offered in a regular high school through individual courses rather than a self-contained center

4. Homebound instruction provided to students who cannot attend school because of pregnancy complications or delivery (Florida Department of Education 1986).

They further recommend that program components include basic academic development, health and family living instruction, health care and nutrition, peer and family counseling, child care services, transportation, job skills development, and community partnerships.

The High Performers' Academy is a relatively comprehensive program in North Oxford, Massachusetts. Robert Richardson, director of the French River Education Center that houses the project, describes the main thrust of the program as the development of a sense of family among the participants. One counselor is assigned the responsibility of developing parenting skills and promoting the economic self-sufficiency of the family. The Center has formed a partnership with Digital Equipment, which provides the Center with equipment, software, teacher training, and executive consulting time. With these resources and their assistance, the Center can train pregnant and parenting teens in computer skills. Such preparation better secures their future. This training is combined with academics and life skills counseling. Additional support for attendance is given through child care and transportation. (*The Christian Science Monitor* 23 April 1987).

Other programs exploit the expertise of the home economics department. A program of the Hartford Public School is unique in its being situated within the high school and not separating pregnant and parenting teens from the mainstream of the high school. The high school provides a day care facility for the children of student parents, which the high school calls the Parent Child Education Center. Student parents who enroll their infants at the Center must take parenting education; others can take it as an elective. The Center can provide hands-on experiences in child rearing to promote skill development in parent-child communication, behavior, and discipline (Connecticut State Board of Education 1987).

Graduation, Reality, and Dual-role Skills (GRADS) is another program developed by home economics educators. During the 1985-86 school year, GRADS programs were operating in 108 high schools throughout Ohio. The goals of the program are to instruct participants in positive health care practices during both the prenatal and postnatal stages and to develop knowledge and skills in effective parenting practices. The program also has the goals of informing participants about career options in the local community and encouraging goal-setting in fulfilling the dual role of employee and parent. The model has been successful: only 13.2 percent of all GRADS students dropped out of school, as compared to the 80 percent dropout rate for teen parents nationally. These programs, and others like them, offer the specialized support pregnant and parent teens need to complete high school (Sandoval and Pritz 1987).

Limited English-Proficient Students

Recent research emphasizes the importance of limited English proficiency as a factor associated with early school leaving (Hammack 1986). The majority of LEP students come from Spanish-speaking homes, and most programs directed at LEP students focus on Hispanic students. Research shows that the dropout rate for Hispanics is almost double the national average, approaching 45 percent. Language differences and poor literacy skills among parents are major factors associated with dropping out among Hispanic students. Some have also speculated that there is a cultural incompatibility between American schools and Hispanic culture; they have said that Hispanic families will emphasize immediate employment over continued education. However, this proposition is not supported by this statistic from NCES (1983): Hispanic students from predominantly English-speaking homes leave school at nationally average rates, whereas Hispanics from non-English-speaking homes leave at twice the national rate.

One program in Nogales, Arizona, represents a well-rounded, intensive effort to prevent dropping out among Hispanic students. Nogales High School has a student body that is 85 percent Hispanic, so it was reasoned that meeting the needs of bilingual students would reduce the dropout rate. Students referred to the program attend classes at an educational facility in a shopping center near the high school. At intake, the educational needs of the students are assessed, and a personalized program is developed for each student that includes career-oriented writing, reading, and mathematics. Guidance counselors also administer an interest and aptitude test to help students in tentative career planning. The program's staff coordinates occupational field trips and work experience. Special services to students include internships, on-the-job training, and job placement made possible through the cooperative efforts of local businesses, the school, and local government. An innovative aspect of the program is its employment of bilingual outreach workers. These outreach workers visit homes to tell parents of their child's progress, attempt to interest the parents in continuing their own education, and familiarize them with the school and their staff (Florida Department of Education 1986).

Southwestern Bell Telephone also encourages Hispanic parents to support the education of their children. The company has produced a parents' guide entitled "Helping Your Child Learn" that is available in both Spanish and English. In addition, a videotape can be purchased from them that addresses the Hispanic dropout problem. The videotape can be used to raise community awareness of the problem and garner resources and support for programs that ameliorate the problem. The continued growth of the Hispanic population, the country's youngest and fastest-growing minority, guarantees that educators will need to find innovative ways to meet the needs of bilingual students (Southwestern Bell Telephone n.d.).

Substance-Abusing Students

School failure, dropping out, teen pregnancy, and substance abuse are inclined to share a related set of casual factors. In a study of 526 students in two Philadelphia public schools, the majority (135 out of 265) who had been using drugs were found to have dropped out later from high school. In contrast, only about one out of four (42 of 158) of the non-drug-using students dropped out. Even after controlling for twenty demographic, personal, and family variables, the extent of one student's earlier drug use was found to predict dropping out to a significant degree. Friedman, Glickman, and Utada (1985), the authors of this study, conceptualized the relationship between drug use and dropping out, not as one of cause-effect, but rather as expressions common to a

tendency of being dissatisfied with school. They suggest that one's failure to enjoy school is an underlying factor that predisposes students to dropping out as well as involvement in drug use. In this conceptualization, dissatisfaction with school could have existed prior to involvement in substance use. Drug use is, thus, a concomitant effect, along with dropping out, of the more basic state of dissatisfaction. Hence, a broader view of dropping out considers changing aspects of the school environment to increase the satisfaction students feel in school.

This broader perspective is reinforced by recent research conducted by High/Scope Educational Research Foundation in Ypsilanti, Michigan. They evaluated their Perry Preschool Project, which provided preschool education to 4-year-old children from minority backgrounds and of low socioeconomic status. The program's classroom was managed in a number of innovative ways. Each morning the children were asked to plan their work for the day. Rather than being highly directive in the classroom, teachers would ask each child to estimate what he or she could accomplish for the day and give the student the responsibility for carrying out what was planned. Children came to see themselves as planners, as people who have power over their lives (Schweinhart and Weikart 1980). Active learning and problem solving was also emphasized in the classroom. In addition, the program encouraged a high degree of interaction among adults and children, among the children themselves, and among parents and teachers. In the longitudinal evaluation, the Perry study found that students enrolled in the Perry Preschool Project were significantly less likely to have learning problems, histories of dropping out of school, delinquency, and teen pregnancy. More to the present point, the study discovered that children who had experienced one year of preschool at age 4 were half as involved in drug use and delinquency at age 15, if and only if the program encouraged students to plan their own activities (*ASCD Curriculum Update* 1987). Clearly, creating an environment that is empowering, enabling, and highly interactive and participative--that is, creating an integrated learning environment--has positive consequences on student behavior, from resisting drug use to completing high school.

This larger perspective has also been bolstered by the conclusions of studies of secondary-level efforts to prevent drug use. Most researchers in the field of substance use prevention agree that feelings of disconnectedness, the paucity of meaningful roles and real-world responsibilities for youth in a culture that prolongs adolescence, and failure of social systems to instill a sense of purpose and community in youth are root causes of substance abuse, along with other youth behavior problems (Levine 1983; Norem-Hebeisen et al. 1983). Schools can ameliorate youth alienation in a number of ways. Positive peer programs can offer alternatives for social contact, support, and fun to marginal youth other than their marginal peers (Polk 1984). Such programs as peer counseling, peer and cross-age tutoring, and peer teaching of substance use information promote self-esteem, mature problem solving, and effective decision-making skills, not to mention positive peer interaction. In addition to linking marginal youth to positive peer role models, schools can develop a network between home, school, and student. The "school-team" approach recommended by the U.S. Department of Education's Alcohol and Drug Abuse Education Program includes parents, teachers, administrators, students, and school board members in substance use prevention. Thus, increased parent and community involvement and increased intensity of student-teacher and peer-peer interaction are crucial to developing comprehensive efforts to reduce abuse (Weisheit 1983).

Encouraging the active collaboration with all involved systems is a distinctive thrust of both drug abuse prevention and dropout prevention efforts. Given this common thrust and the correlation between dropping out and substance use, it is not surprising that dropout prevention programs often have a substance use prevention component.

Street School, Inc., of Tulsa, Oklahoma, is a program for dropouts and potential dropouts that emphasizes drug and alcohol treatment and mental health services. Each student negotiates a personal plan of action with the educational and counseling staff. The plan details behavioral goals and steps for implementation. The staff counsels students individually at least once a week and refers students to social service agencies as needed (GAO Survey of Local Programs 1987).

A program in North Carolina, cited by Florida's Department of Education as a substance use program that also prevents dropping out, is a structured course with three phases. OMBUDSMAN, as the course is called, first focuses on self-awareness, with exercises done that promote a greater understanding of one's values. The second phase teaches group skills. Students are given an opportunity to develop communication, problem-solving, and decision-making skills that can be applied both with OMBUDSMAN and in other important group contexts, such as with families and peers. The third phase represents the culmination of the effort to connect students to school, home, and community in constructive ways. During this final phase, students use the insights and skills gained in the classroom to plan and carry out a project within the community or school. Once again, the emphasis is on empowering, enabling, and connecting: These emphases characterize environments that will both prevent substance abuse and dropping out.

Handicapped Students

The high dropout rates of handicapped students has prompted educators around the country to develop support services designed to encourage those students' high school completion. Although no national statistics are available, state and local statistics indicate a serious problem. In Vermont, 34 percent of the mildly handicapped public school youth are dropping out. In several school districts in Florida, the dropout rate for handicapped youth is 31 percent. In a northeastern urban school district with a 30 percent dropout rate among nonhandicapped youth, over 50 percent of the learning disabled youth who were ninth graders in 1978-79 did not graduate from high school (Miller, Leinhardt, and Zigmond 1987).

Many programs for learning disabled youth in particular provide a combination of academic instruction and vocational training. Project HELP (Handicapped Education Learning Project) of Woonsocket, Rhode Island, locates dropouts and potential dropouts and places them appropriately in vocational and academic programs. A coordinator is assigned to assist students with alternative educational programming and with finding after-school employment. Project HELP serves as a school-based liaison to other organizations, which results in continuity of services for students. The program is not at all stigmatized: in fact, other students in the school perceive the program as rewarding the potential dropout and the dropout with special placements and part-time jobs, which might encourage more students to leave school. Actually, Project HELP was selected as an effective dropout prevention practice by the Tri-State Midwest Regional Resource Center, and has given many potential dropouts the support they need to complete school (Counterpoint printout 1982).

The linkage to community agencies to access support seems to be a characteristic feature of programs designed to keep handicapped students in school. The New York City Schools employ a district health screening team to serve as a preliminary method of identifying pupils who may have physical, cognitive, or emotional handicapping conditions that require further evaluation or referral to appropriate support services available in the school and through local agencies (Quinones 1986). The Tri-SELPA's

Job Project of Lafayette, California, coordinates such resources as JTPA, county offices, school districts, federal agencies, and business to help handicapped youth prepare for employment. Thus, educators have found that combining vocational training and academic instruction in school and coordinating community resources for health services and employment preparation lowers the dropout rate for handicapped students (Association of California Urban School Districts 1985).

The Economically Disadvantaged

Low socioeconomic status is a factor correlated with dropping out often cited in the research literature (Ekstrom et al. 1986). Wagner (1986) has speculated on the reasons for this correlation. Economically disadvantaged students often find it difficult to continue school, she argues, due to (1) the pressure of economic needs, (2) the lack of material necessities, (3) the devaluation of education by parents, and (4) the irrelevance of the curriculum. Many poor students seek full-time employment to ease their own financial situations or their families', which precludes attendance at school during the daytime. In addition to this economic pressure to leave school, poor students often feel a social pressure. Poor students can't afford the luxury of socially acceptable clothing, as judged by their high school peers, or the equipment necessary for extracurricular activities. Consequently, they feel alienated from the high school environment, out of the mainstream of the school's activities. Familial pressure is also felt. Parents of poor students often don't positively reinforce educational achievement. The parents tend to have a low level of educational attainment and don't perceive a connection between education now and success in the future. As one parent told his child, good grades don't put groceries on the table. The pressing economic reality of the present forfeits the luxury of delayed gratification for future rewards. Finally, the school is not as responsive as it could be to the interests or needs of its poor students. Curricular content and materials don't relate in a compelling way to the interests and backgrounds of deprived students. Wagner recommends that more industrial education courses be offered and that texts reflect urban settings. The recommendations and considerations will increase the responsiveness of schools to the economically disadvantaged and reduce their dropout rate.

Other Support Services

There are groups that have not been considered thus far that are also at risk. Columbus Public School officials have directed their attention to black males. Twelve thousand black males each year leave the school system. In an effort to reduce this number, school officials invited 300 at-risk middle and high school students to a four-hour conference on self-esteem, male sexuality, career awareness, and drug abuse. To offer positive role models to troubled black youths, male members of two black churches visit 10 elementary schools to work with certain students as tutors, pen pals, and friends. These strategies, which could be implemented on a secondary level in a mentoring program, are the result of combined efforts of the school district and the Coalition of Concerned Black Citizens, a community group of about 50 people. They are concerned because black students lead the list in suspensions and expulsion, as well as dropout rates (*The Columbus Dispatch* 25 February 1987).

Concern has also been expressed for Native American students. Their dropout rate, estimated at a shocking 75 percent, is the highest dropout rate of any minority group. The Indian Studies Program of the Great Falls (Montana) School District is targeted at

all Native Americans in grades K-12. The Indian Studies Program uses home-school coordinators to identify children within home, school, and community settings in order to place them in appropriate educational programs. Support materials and resource persons are provided by the Indian Studies Resource Center, and a tutoring service aids students who are having academic difficulties. A parent committee serves as a liaison to the school to communicate community needs and parent concerns. The reduction of the dropout rate from 75 percent to 12.3 percent has been attributed to the program (Counterpoint printout 6 January 1985).

Migrant students have been another focus of concern for educators. The uniqueness of migrants' lifestyles often places undue hardships on them. Frequent movement and short-term enrollment make it difficult for migrant children to realize their vocational and academic potential. A Secondary Add-On Tutorial Program is being conducted on a statewide level by Florida as part their Migrant Dropout Prevention Programs. This after-school tutorial program provides supplementary tutorial services. The service assists secondary-level migrants to (1) make up hours of instruction, (2) accrue credits missed, and (3) remediate any specific academic deficiencies. The tutors will also serve as advocates and provide informal counseling to their students (Florida Department of Education 1986).

As mentioned before, poor students, including many migrant students, live under conditions that place undue stress on them. Poor students often suffer health problems that go untreated due to limited access to health services. An organizer of a job-training program for high school dropouts in Miami, Brenda Shapiro, found that more than half of the youth had long-standing hearing and visual problems. Further, a 1980 study of 100 juvenile offenders in Dade County, Florida, most of them from poor families, discovered that half had difficulty with visual-motor skills. Poor eyesight and hearing are clearly organic factors that contribute to school failure. Houston has responded to the comprehensive health needs of inner-city adolescents by creating a Houston adolescent clinic. The school system there can use this clinic as a resource in addressing the health problems of its students that impede school performance and completion (Lefkowitz 1987).

A population much harder to identify than those with hearing and visual impairments, but just as pervasive, is the disaffected student. Although it is difficult to define this category of student, teachers are all too familiar with the profile: the student so resigned and in such despair that seemingly any effort to help will be resisted. A program designed to reach this student must be intensive. Such a program is represented by the Focus Dissemination Project. FOCUS, developed by Human Resources Associates, Inc., of Minnesota, is targeted at disaffected secondary students of all ability levels. FOCUS offers highly structured classes personalized to the student's ability and need. Curriculum materials are tailored to meet the student's level of skill development and are presented in relation to survival beyond graduation. To promote affective development, all FOCUS students are involved in a group counseling experience called the Family. The Family consists of 8-10 students and one teacher. They meet daily throughout the year to provide ongoing emotional support to each other and heighten a sense of constructive belongingness (Association of California Urban School Districts 1985). Indeed, enabling students to belong in a meaningful way to school seems to be the essential thrust of all support services, regardless of the target population.

CHAPTER 8

IMPROVING THE SCHOOL CLIMATE

In addressing the dropout problem as a school administrator, it is useful to look at the school as a system. A system is "a complex of elements or components directly or indirectly related in a causal network, such that each component is related to some others in a more or less stable way within any particular period of time" (Buckley 1967, p. 41). The interrelationships of the components create a whole that is greater than the sum of its parts. That which characterizes the whole in the school is often termed "school climate."

The interrelationship of system parts gives rise to new qualities that are a function of the transactions within the system. Thus, occurrences within the school are not reducible to teachers, administrators, students or the community. Rather, events in the school are products of interactions among all these components. The systems model shifts attention away from characteristics possessed by individual units to interactions and relatedness. Thinking in terms of the systems model "requires the abandonment of the linear approach to causation and the substitution of an understanding of the reciprocal relationships among all parts of the field (transactional approach) and an interactive focus, in which the effects of one system on another are dealt with" (Compton and Galoway 1984, p. 116). Used in this way, systems theory will help change agents avoid the tendency to focus on either the individual or on society as the primary source of pathology or as the primary target of change. Change agents then consider the multiple factors that bear on causation of a problem, which, in turn, presents those change agents with multiple possibilities for intervention.

When change agents seek to change a school system in order to increase its holding power, there are certain characteristics that they should strive to maximize. These characteristics are the characteristics of an integrated learning environment, or ILE: interconnectedness and openness. To have holding power, a school must have tightly (but not rigidly) interconnected elements in the school as an internal system. Further, to have a system that produces and maintains an open and interconnected school structure, a school needs information and energy from outside that internal system in order to be continually revitalized and to provide the system with direction. To achieve this, the school will need to open up and link to external systems. An open and interconnected school is a school with a positive school climate--positive for everyone. Thus, even though attempts at restructuring school are motivated by the dropout problem, a restructured school is simply a school that is attractive to both students and teachers.

The creation of a positive school climate, then, can be brought about by manipulating school-related factors. Some of these school-related factors are associated with producing a school environment that is supportive and responsive. The interventions manipulating these factors include attendance monitoring (responding to student absence), availability of flexible scheduling (supporting diverse student schedules), modification of pushout policies (responding constructively and nonpunitively to student difficulties), and provision of support services (supporting students in completing school when they need to cope with difficult circumstances). In addition to these interventions that promote a supportive and responsive environment, other interventions can heighten a sense of belongingness, increase cohesiveness, and reduce anomie. In one high school, the dropout rate was reduced after school grounds

were cleaned and made more attractive. Some students (especially in inner-city schools) cite safety as a factor in their decision to drop out. Schools can maintain safety by being clear, consistent, and fair in establishing and enforcing rules governing student behavior. Schools can also employ character education to teach the highest aspirations of a democratic society--for example, respect for others, tolerance of differences, pursuit of an equitable society, respect for property, and the prohibition of violence. Repeated messages that say, "This is **your** school," will reduce vandalism. To promote this ownership, the school personnel can empower students by giving them decision-making power and seeking their input on school policies.

These are some concrete suggestions about creating a positive school climate, but more general recommendations derive from the school effectiveness literature. Of special concern in dropout prevention efforts is the establishment of clear and consistent rules and the definition of and a commitment to an organizational mission. School climate can also be invigorated by opening the boundaries of the school system to allow parents and the community to be active participants in creating educational experiences for youth. Increasing parent choice and linking to businesses and social service agencies effectuate a more open school. Further, linking with middle school to ease a student's transition into high school also expands the boundaries of school; and linking to postsecondary institutions can ease the transition from high school to work and further education.

School Effectiveness

Nancy Peck, a state-level administrator directing dropout prevention efforts in Florida, recommends that any dropout prevention effort incorporate the following elements of effective schooling:

- Principal as instructional leader
- A strong academic core
- Monitoring of student performance and feedback
- Teacher efficacy
- Clear and consistent rules about behavior
- Maintenance of high expectations
- A positive school climate including a safe and orderly environment, a pleasant atmosphere, and staff commitment to caring and advocacy for youth

In a successful school (i.e., a school that retains students and creates a valuable educational experience for them), the principal is an instructional leader who guides the school in fulfilling a clearly stated mission that emphasizes excellence. Staff frequently evaluate student progress, and prompt feedback is given on student conduct. Consistent and fair discipline is maintained. Teachers have high expectations for all students and give the support needed to fulfill those expectations. A sense of purpose defines the school climate; there is a commitment to learning. Some have suggested that the features of the school or program climate are even more important than the actual design or content of the program or school. It would probably be more accurate

to say that a positive climate is necessary to support the success of other interventions, but not sufficient.

In any case, an instructional leader is the key to raising the commitment to learning through changes in the learning environment. This person assumes responsibility for articulating the school's educational mission as high achievement for all students, up to the maximum of their abilities. The instructional leader coordinates and monitors school activities to see that they contribute to this goal. He or she ensures that the school learning climate is characterized by a positive set of beliefs, expectations, and practices that clearly communicate to staff and students alike that the school will have high achievement and that staff members collectively accept responsibility to that end

Thus, staff members need to have high academic and behavioral expectations for students and clearly communicate those standards. Holding to high standards and expectations in a supportive atmosphere gives students a sense of pride. However, academic tasks should not be overwhelming--this will only reinforce negative self-concept. Tasks should be manageable and performance-based. Further, behavioral expectations can be maintained by accurate recordkeeping that tracks student progress and attendance.

Ideally, the disciplinarian should be firm, but caring, and have patience in working for behavioral change. The disciplinarian must also be flexible in considering alternative means of discipline, especially in dealing with disaffected students. For example, out-of-school suspension, a traditional disciplinary option, is a reward for a student who would prefer not to be in school. This option is therefore ineffective in bringing about desired behavioral change.

Districts in Florida are required to exhaust a continuum of educational and student services interventions before assigning a disruptive student to a disciplinary program of more than ten days in duration, except when the student has committed an offense which may warrant expulsion. A disruptive behavior may be defined as any behavior that (1) seriously threatens the general welfare of students or others with whom students come into contact, (2) interferes with the student's own learning or the learning of others, and (3) results in frequent conflicts while the student is under the jurisdiction of the school. After exhausting all possible alternative responses to disruptive behavior, districts in Florida have developed disciplinary programs that help students acquire attitudes and skills that lead to success in school, provide bolstered instructional and student support services, and help students become better able to cope and problem solve. The MacArthur Senior High School of the Dade County Schools is one such program. Many of the students referred to this program are impulsive and hostile; many have exhibited serious attendance problems since elementary school. At MacArthur High, all classes within the alternative school are smaller than in the traditional school. The student-teacher ratio does not exceed 18:1. This low ratio facilitates the social bonding of students to teachers. Teachers have received special training to assist students with behavior problems. All students receive individualized instruction and are graded noncompetitively. The school climate could be characterized as friendly and supportive (Florida Department of Education 1986).

The disciplinarian can be reminded by this program that the focus of effective discipline should not be control but nurturance. The expectation is that high school students can behave in an adult fashion, and caring adults invest themselves to promote that development. This high expectation for behavior leads naturally to an emphasis on

clear rules and consistent enforcement. An orderly environment makes it possible to have a commitment to learning.

Generating such commitment requires that staff maintain high hopes for student achievement. The commitment is possible only if educators keep the following in mind as a guiding premise of educational practice: each student has a valuable and unique contribution to make to school, and it is incumbent upon the school to set up opportunities for students to realize their potential in making valuable contributions to the school. This idea is in sharp contrast to the principle that frequently operates: some students "have it in them" and others don't, so teach to the best. The most educators can do for the others, in this view, is help the "have-nots" cope with an environment that is stultifying and frustrating for those students. However, these educators claim, there is an upper boundary to what "those students" can do, and one can never expect them to achieve beyond that and really be active contributors to the school culture. The most one can expect is for them to "get by." But who sets the threshold of achievement? How is the judgment made? Who constricts the view of school culture so that only academic or athletic achievement is recognized? A more expansive view of school culture would cultivate many diverse ways to realize potential, as there are many different individuals. Under this more expansive view, evaluation of student performance would not be based on comparison with peers in a narrow range of competencies, but on the degree of individual growth brought about by unique educational experiences. In this view, all students can achieve since all students can become more fully who they are.

Inculcating such an attitude among school staff and students should serve to counteract lowered expectations based on stereotypes. Students are just as much victims of narrow-minded notions of who achieves and why as are staff. Students from minority backgrounds often internalize the discriminatory attitudes of the larger society. Black students, for example, avoid academic success for fear of being labeled a "brainiac" by their peers. This attitude stemmed from a tradition in white America of not considering blacks as capable of intellectual achievement.

Systematic attempts to raise expectations of achievement can be found throughout the country. One effective program modifies teacher expectation. Project STILE (Student-Teacher Interactive Learning Environment) is a model inservice program for teachers and other staff. The program is based on research showing that positive and negative teacher expectations are communicated through teacher behaviors. STILE trains teachers to discover negative patterns of interaction and replace them with positive ones. Teachers are trained as trainers of a larger group of teachers. These trainers observe classes, provide feedback on teacher behavior, and lead problem-solving discussions for the other teachers. After being introduced to STILE, those teachers will attend workshops featuring presentations on teacher expectations, role playing, and meetings with students. The program has been effective in raising teachers' awareness of their interactions with students and ways to modify them to convey higher expectations (Counterpoint printout 11 December 1985).

Higher expectations for students will heighten teachers' commitment to helping all students to learn, which will, in turn, heighten the students' commitment to learning. Another intervention that will heighten teachers' commitment to students is allowing teachers a relative degree of autonomy in directing their programs. Such autonomy promotes ownership of the program and allows for creativity in solving problems and setting up educational experiences.

At-risk students are especially sensitive to staff expectations and other organizational factors that affect school climate. When schools are especially large (defined as a student population greater than 1,100), marginal students will engage in more delinquent behavior, indicate little attachment to school on questionnaires, and exhibit low interpersonal competency (Gottfredson July 1985). This suggests that bonding is difficult for at-risk students in a bustling high school, so that smaller programs with low teacher-student ratios are more accommodating to their needs.

Disaffected students often suffer from high levels of anxiety. They can be provided with opportunities to lower their level of anxiety. Informal settings that are safe, with fair and consistent rules followed, and friendly, with strong peer support and staff interaction, will reduce anxiety for at-risk students. At-risk students also find it much easier to deal with frustration when a strong support system is in place and they have readily accessible resources to address their issues and concerns. Because of the at-risk student's high anxiety level, he or she is in need of a higher level of support to perform adequately.

In summary, a positive, growth-promoting climate is one in which the instructional leader articulates a clear organizational mission, staff members have high behavioral and learning expectations for students, positive student behavior is encouraged by firm and caring guidance, and the atmosphere is safe and friendly.

Linkages to the Community

A few decades ago the dropout rate was much higher than it is now. Jobs in the manufacturing and agricultural sectors easily absorbed individuals with a tenth or even eighth grade education, and the services sector absorbed those who had the skills imparted by a high school education. Economic and social conditions have changed. The manufacturing sector is slowing in its growth, and both smokestack industries and agriculture have become less labor-intensive with the advance of high technology. This trend will continue in the future. The service sector is demanding people with technical skills and capacities to make decisions, solve problems, and think critically. This sector is hungry for workers with postsecondary educations. In this context, a group of young people who have not graduated from high school will not have a place in a workplace requiring upgraded skills. The pool of eligible employees will diminish for businesses and America as a nation will weaken and fail to meet the challenges of international competition.

The point: The dropout problem became a problem due to social and economic conditions, so social and economic institutions have a vital role to play in the solution. The dropout problem is not only the concern of educators.

But in order to involve parents, businesses, social service agencies, and politicians in addressing the dropout problem, these organizations need to redefine their boundaries, knock down walls, give up notions of turf. They will need to avoid divisive blaming and instead focus on shared responsibilities and needed changes. These organizations will need to combine forces in new ways to release the energy necessary to stop the tragedy of the wasted human potential represented by the dropout problem.

All sectors have a stake. Businesses have a stake: dropout prevention can be seen as a form of long-term human resource development. Social service agencies have a stake: dropout prevention will better ensure a positive future for our youth and

mitigate youth alienation and all its symptoms. Government has a stake: dropout prevention will result in a strong tax base and a productive citizenry. The nation as a whole has a stake: the continued progress of the nation relies on the educational commitment and attainment of its people.

All of these institutions are part of the cause; all have a stake in its solution; therefore all need to invest their resources in preventing the dropout problem. Groups that have a stake will need to open lines of communication and cooperation to mobilize for dropout prevention.

The mobilization will need to start at a grassroots level. Concerned individuals and invested institutions of a particular community will need to define the problem locally. And a locally defined problem requires a locally designed solution. A local solution will enjoin all segments of the community to contribute their expertise, support, and resources to a concerted dropout prevention effort. A task force or committee or informal meeting should be guided by flexibility--an openness to multiple strategies--and should strive to build consensus--an effort to avoid mapping out turf (NFIE 1986).

By being a focal point for the mobilization of community resources, schools will be showing a commitment to opening themselves to the involvement of others in the community. Educators across the country are collaborating with the community to help potential dropouts and dropouts. The Cities in School model is based on this very concept that dropping out is a multifaceted problem of community scope, so the solution needs to embrace all aspects of the community. Cities in School (CIS) is a national model that was developed in response to the dispersal of already-existent community resources. CIS forges partnerships with community agencies in order to place staff in schools where they can get to know the students, be readily accessible to them, and follow through on a regular basis. The staff works on building self-esteem, communication skills, career exploration, and employability skills. The CIS program is labor intensive but remains cost effective because it simply reallocates existing resources and uses volunteers (Florida Department of Education 1986).

CIS brings community resources into the school. Schools also can reach out for resources in the community. Hart County (Kentucky) Public Schools have taken a district-wide approach to helping the county's at-risk population. Schools and the community cooperate to offer students a variety of programs such as work experience (through JTPA), special education for students having academic difficulty, counseling support, and cross-grade activity programs (NFIE 1986).

Linkages are an important component of any dropout prevention effort. A linkage is a working relationship between district-wide efforts, schools, or programs and services or resources outside of the school system that aid in dropout prevention. Any successful dropout prevention effort not only makes students feel needed, but also makes community members feel that they are contributing to the problem's solution. A highly supportive environment is then created for students to prevent their dropping out: valuable one-on-one relationships are built with students, the school atmosphere is friendly and open, and the community is given systematic opportunities to show its caring.

This network can be vital in reducing alienation among youth. Urie Bronfenbrenner (1986) has explored the role of insufficient support systems in promoting alienation among youth--especially with regard to educational institutions. Essentially, to feel alienated is to lack a sense of belonging. There have been a number of stressors on

family life that challenge that unit's coping skills. Almost two out of every three women (married or single) with school-age children work outside the home. Divorce unsettles many homes, and children from such conflict-ridden settings are often too distracted to be able to concentrate. Support systems, such as the extended family and close neighborhoods, have weakened. Children from stressed families feel alone and attempt to gain a sense of belonging by developing strong attachments to an often-delinquent peer group. Bronfenbrenner argues that school is in the best position to offset the forces of alienation because it is "the only place in which all children gather everyday." Schools can be the catalysts that build links between home and school, middle school and high school, and school and the community. Since alienation can be equated to disconnectedness, the way to combat alienation is to create connections among home, peer group, community and school.

The creation of connections can be facilitated by making fundamental organizational changes in the school. Such changes can aim at creating and maintaining a structure that serves to share decision making among community agencies, students, teachers, school administrators, and parents in the management of the school. One could set up an advisory council on dropout prevention efforts that represents these diverse segments. By empowering community members in giving them a voice in the affairs of the school, a school can gain support, seek input, and garner resources from the community (McDill, Natriello, and Pallas 1986).

A particularly important and concerned ally in advancing the cause of education in the community is business and industry. Businesses rely on schools to provide them with a pool of educated workers, so they are often willing to invest money, time, and materials into improving the retentive power of high schools. The Boston Compact is an excellent example of the extent to which companies are willing to make an investment in high schools. In the first three years of the Compact, a written agreement between business, school, and other community groups, progress was made on youth jobs and student achievement, two of the Compact's goals. The dropout rate, however, showed little decline. This indicates that job and school improvement efforts are not enough. With over 3,000 young people dropping out annually, the Compact is broadening its focus to target the dropout problem specifically. With the high failure rate of ninth graders, the largest of any grade level in the system, the task force directed attention and resources to grades 6-9. The long-range plan for dropout prevention has four elements: (1) A city-wide leadership policy states that it is a community-wide responsibility to see that all young people are equipped by age 19 with the basic skills necessary to get a job, further training, or higher education. (2) Dropout goals have been revised to include an annual dropout rate for each high school for the next 3 years, a goal for each graduating class, and a goal based on the number of 16-19-year-olds to be served and placed in the city-run education and employment system over the next 5 years. The city's business and university sectors will guarantee placement in a job, training program, or postsecondary education for all graduates certified as literate by the Boston public schools. (3) Programs to help the at-risk subpopulations will be strengthened. These include the following:

- Expanding summer basic skills programs to the whole year
- Alternative programs for the most disruptive or at-risk students
- Support services for dropouts, such as counseling and assessment

- o Links to the state's employment and training programs and adult literacy centers

- o Day care and parent education for teen mothers

- o Drug and alcohol treatment, and health care

Finally, (4) schools need to institute policy and administrative changes such as bonuses for enrollment growth and putting teachers in charge of dropout prevention programs. The Compact is described as an experiment in educational change that combines a top-down approach of macropolitical consensus on school system goals with a bottom-up approach to planning school improvement (Hargroves 1986).

Business people are also in the position to offer personnel and technical resources, in addition to job guarantees and help in planning. Project COFFEE, an alternative high school meeting the needs of potential dropouts in North Oxford, Massachusetts, was developed by a regional cooperative federation of seven school districts and a highly successful partnership with Digital Equipment. Digital Equipment's Educational Services provided curriculum materials, staff training, consultation, and job training experiences for students (Project COFFEE).

But business involvement does not stop at technical assistance and resource development. Many business people are willing to make a very personal investment in the lives of at-risk youth. Professional and business volunteers are in a unique position to provide career information and counseling, assist in occupational or job-seeking training, and help dropout-prone students see the need for education. The Youth Motivation Program of Pinellas County is a business partnership where business people invest themselves in the future of youth. At-risk students are identified and matched with "youth motivators" who help these students develop life goals, improve employability skills, provide tutoring, serve as positive role models, and listen actively to and support students. Youth motivators attend training sessions to help them carry out their volunteer work (Florida Department of Education 1986).

Businesses, then, can support schools in their dropout prevention efforts in a number of ways. They can aid in the development of work experience programs, mentor programs, and incentive programs. Successful professionals in business can be invited to come to the school and talk to classes about the world of work.

The world of work, though, is not the only world in which adolescents grow into adult roles. The school can also create closer links to other places that adolescents grow: the home and the community. The developmental potential for adolescents in a school setting will be increased as a function of the number of supportive links between the school and other settings (Bronfenbrenner 1979). Hence, the more linkages made, the more enriched the learning environment will be in terms of promoting adolescent development. More linkages between the settings of home, school, and work have been found to result in higher scores among adolescents in empathy for adults and ease of communicating with adults (Coleman and Beckman 1980).

This concept of tight networks improving the "ecology" of adolescents points up the importance of schools linking with parents to ease the dropout problem. Schools need to coordinate and collaborate with families in their mutual efforts to address the array of problems of youth. Parents can be partners with the school in assuming equal responsibility for their children's learning, in encouraging regular school attendance

and completion of homework assignments, and by taking advantage of other educational opportunities available outside of the formal school environment.

The Pittsburgh Urban League has developed and supported a program called PEP (Parent Enrichment Program), which enables low-income parents to aid their youth's education progress (National Urban League 1986). PEP is a series of workshops designed to increase parent effectiveness in coping with educational issues. PEP also trains parents to observe and evaluate their child's school, helping them in becoming effective monitors of their child's education. The workshops cover such topics as the child's needs as a student at home, drug abuse, the impact of health and nutrition on learning, and productive school learning environments. This program is unfunded. Expert consultants from the school district, social service agencies, hospitals, and universities volunteer their time and expertise in conducting workshops: linkages to the community to promote linkages to the home!

There are, of course, other ways to heighten parental involvement. Parents can be invited to informational meetings that make parents aware of curricular options and alternative programs. For example, to foster awareness of vocational programs, the school can conduct presentations featuring local employers and vocational graduates. Parents need to be shown how to provide planning and support to their children in selecting their school programs (Weber 1986). Teachers can develop contracts with parents, and parents can agree to support the educational goals of the child, attend PTA meetings, and maintain regular communication with the school. The contract is periodically reviewed and modified. The contract helps in giving direction to parent involvement (Florida Department of Education 1986). Other activities that promote parental involvement include parent-student social activities, parent volunteer services (in tutoring, consulting, or helping in the library or study hall), school tours, welcome wagons, and home visits by teachers. Schools can also form family support groups and make referrals to family counseling.

Unfortunately, the relationships between home and school in the past have been less than amicable. Teachers often blame parents for students' difficulties, and parents accuse teachers of being uncaring and incompetent. The stand-off is counterproductive and leads to failure of both groups to take effective and coordinated action. The end to the stand-off can only come about if both parents and school staff are willing to take equal responsibility and share initiatives.

Of course, there are times when the problems of youth overwhelm the well-intentioned efforts of both the school and the home. Stronger linkages to community resources can then be made to build bridges for those youth who are disconnected from home, school, and work. If schools forge these linkages, they can establish support systems that go beyond school boundaries and be better able to catch at-risk students in a safety net. Much community help that has been solicited in schools' dropout prevention efforts may not appear to relate directly to dropout prevention, but addresses factors that contribute to the problem. A student might receive needed clothing from Goodwill Industries or counseling from Jewish or Catholic Family Services, have a Big Brother or Sister, be tutored in reading at the public library, receive job counseling or placement from the Urban League, and get eyeglasses from the Lions Club or Kiwanis (Florida Department of Education 1986).

Government agencies provide help as well. Publicly funded service programs can be seen as dropout prevention support systems. They include mental and physical health services, juvenile delinquency prevention, vocational training, economic and social welfare services, maternity and infant care, rehabilitation, parks and recreation

programs, and employment services. Some school districts in Florida have assigned a staff member full-time to maintain a directory of services and coordinate the delivery of multifaceted services to students.

The New York City Schools have made a systematic effort to ensure that health services are rendered to students. The district has issued a circular stating that all targeted students participating in dropout prevention programs must have a health plan. Schools contract with community-based organizations (CBOs) to provide whatever services are necessary to ensure that each student has his or her needs met in a comprehensive way. Diagnostic information is obtained in order to make appropriate referrals to educational, physical, and mental health services. This effort on the part of New York City Schools has maximized the opportunity for students to receive needed health services in a timely and efficient manner (Quinones 1986).

Another important service area is in the area of work preparation. Recently, state directors of vocational education have explored the possibilities of working with Job Training Partnership Act (JTPA) programs to develop a summer program that mixes classroom learning with job experience. In New Jersey, the two systems found that there was an overlapping of goals, which could serve as a basis for collaboration. The goals of work maturity and job skills competencies for youth are important in both vocational education co-op programs and the JTPA summer youth program. The collaborators realized that JTPA summer youth programs could be used to offer jobs to dropouts under the condition that they finish a remedial education program and earn a diploma. A new statewide initiative called "10,000 graduates, 10,000 jobs" is another incentive structure for school completion that is a result of the linkage of the two systems. The initiative, modeled on the Boston Compact, will guarantee jobs to graduates of 81 urban high schools if those graduates meet attendance, proficiency test, and employment skills requirements. A "business services unit" in each of the schools will find these jobs through openings in JTPA and private-sector contacts. Such enticements to finish school could only be given if schools combined efforts with government agencies and business, as with New Jersey schools and JTPA (*Vocational Training News* 14 May 1987).

70001 represents another initiative to provide youth with employment services. 70001 is a national nonprofit corporation that helps schools set up dropout recovery/prevention programs by creating partnerships between schools, community organizations, private industry councils, and other local agencies. The programs developed have three components: (1) education in academic skills, (2) employment services that teach job-seeking skills and provide job placement opportunities, and (3) a motivational component consisting of a support group and activities that build self-esteem. In Norfolk, Virginia, 70001 established linkages with Systems Management America (SMA) Corporation and Norfolk Public Schools to start a "stay-in-school job training program" for mothers and mothers-to-be (Sizemore 1985).

As the motivational component of the 70001 programs indicates, employment services are not enough. At-risk youth need to feel the supportiveness of involved others. Community agencies have a role to play here, as well. Big Brothers/Big Sisters matches children from single parent homes with adult volunteers. These volunteers provide children with a positive adult role model and guidance and friendship. The Big Brother/Big Sister agency in Dade County works with local public schools to identify children who might benefit from a one-to-one friendship with an adult. The concern and guidance of an adult volunteer may be very helpful to a student experiencing behavior problems in school, poor academic performance, or absenteeism. This support could be

the determining factor in school continuation for the youth (Florida Department of Education 1986).

Valuable support for youth can also be gained through senior citizens. The Retired Senior Volunteer Program (RSVP) is a national volunteer agency that offers a wide range of services to school-age youth. In Florida, the volunteers tutor low-achieving students, work in drug awareness programs, serve as surrogate grandparents for latchkey children, and assist in child care for the abused and neglected. Dropouts and potential dropouts have been encouraged to succeed in school and life by RSVP volunteers. The growing population of senior citizens represents a valuable resource for schools (Florida Department of Education 1986).

This discussion certainly has not exhausted all the possibilities for school-community collaboration in dropout prevention. There are school substance abuse programs conducted by Mothers Against Drunk Driving (MADD), recreational activities through YMCA and parks and recreation, fund raisers of parent/teacher associations, programs sponsored by the juvenile justice system, and so on. Innovative and creative programs abound that utilize out-of-school people. An obvious way for schools to develop a sense of community in their students is for schools themselves to develop strong linkages to community resources, bringing the community into the school and expanding the boundaries of the school to encompass the community. The collaboration of government, higher education, business and industry, social service agencies, civic groups, unions and parents will bring about new and expanded programs for at-risk youth. However, of even greater importance, schools working with people from the community in more effective and innovative ways will develop an enriched "ecology" for adolescents where home, school, work, and community are closely interconnected to aid youths' transitions into productive adult roles.

Articulation

The educational system can be regarded as a continuum that extends from kindergarten to graduate school. As Hodgkinson (1985) has pointed out, it is "all one system." Consistent with this notion, high schools have articulated with elementary schools, middle schools, and postsecondary institutions to enhance their dropout prevention efforts.

At the lower end of the continuum, high schools have developed cross-age tutoring programs to encourage students to complete high school. Horn (*U.S. News and World Report* 18 May 1987) relates this heartening success story of a young man in such a program:

> One of those helped [by dropout prevention efforts in San Antonio], 18-year-old Juan Perez, was failing most of his classes last year and was chronically truant until he was asked to tutor at a nearby elementary school, says a program administrator. Perez's attendance rate improved dramatically, and he is now earning passing grades in all of his classes. "I wouldn't mind becoming a teacher," says Perez. "I tell the kids: Dropping out is one big mistake for your whole life. It spoils everything." (p. 67)

Through articulation with the elementary school, the high school has taught Juan Perez that he has a valuable contribution to make to the learning community. This is a far different appraisal than the label "slow learner" implied. Cross-age tutoring not only

raises the self-esteem of at-risk youth in high schools but also upgrades the academic level of elementary school students in the area of math and language skills.

In addition, high schools can articulate with middle schools to serve at-risk youth better. Students who are having trouble coping with the challenges of middle school will most likely have trouble in high school too. These students can be targeted and special efforts can be made to carry over remedial help to the high school. An extensive summer orientation can ease the transition from middle school to high school. The high school could even have volunteer high school students be assigned as "buddies" to incoming freshmen who are at-risk. When high schools link with middle schools, it becomes possible to coordinate services and ensure that at-risk students are progressing toward goals. The effectiveness of linkage activities for at-risk students, such as high school orientation, transitional guidance services, and intensive summer remediation programs before entering high school has been well documented by the National Diffusion Network (Quinones 1986).

Other effective practices originate in the articulation of high schools with postsecondary institutions. The Middle College High School is a model dropout prevention program based on such an articulation. Horn, in the article quoted above, gives this vignette of a student's experience in the program:

> Middle College High School in Queens, New York, places students who are failing in a special high school on a college campus. . . . LaShawn Thomas, an 18-year-old who lives with her mother in Brooklyn, has given up cutting classes for A's and B's in Middle College High. In the spring she did an internship with New York City Councilwoman Ruth Messinger. Now, she plans to go to law school. "I found something I wanted to do, and I'll strive to do it. Maybe I'll be a councilwoman some day." (p. 67)

LaShawn Thomas, like Juan Perez in working with elementary students, has learned that she has a vital role to play in society. She now has high expectations for her future, largely because she was placed in a program that demanded her commitment and expected excellence. LaShawn and others in the program will move directly into the community college.

High schools can articulate with postsecondary institutions to cultivate resources not directly related to a program. A university can serve as a third party catalyst in helping schools, community service agencies, and local government units redefine their role relationships in creating new linkages. Universities can begin programs where college interns are "classroom counselors" who monitor the student's attendance and discuss grades and attitudes toward school with participants (California Department of Education 1986). College interns can also be tutors and positive role models (especially if they are from minority backgrounds and teaching minority students). Universities are in a unique position to develop teacher training programs, internship programs, and evaluation designs. Thus, from elementary school to graduate school, high schools can articulate with other levels to buttress dropout prevention efforts.

CHAPTER 9

INCREASING EDUCATIONAL RELEVANCE

The integrated learning environment (ILE) is characterized by interconnectedness and openness. Previous chapters have covered strategies that heighten these features in schools on a school level. Attendance improvement efforts better insure the connectedness of students to school; flexible scheduling matches more closely the school schedule with diverse student schedules--thus heightening the participation of students in school; modification of pushout policies encourages students to stay in school and support services help them to continue, even under difficult circumstances; and an improvement of the school climate occurs such that school staff and students are working toward a common goal and the school is well-connected to other institutions. Such are the interventions on a school level that can promote the integration of a school environment.

This chapter and subsequent chapters will focus on the events in the classroom that are indicative of an ILE. The discussion relates more directly to the experiences of students and teachers in the act of learning. Openness and interconnectedness are also features of a classroom that is part of an ILE and, therefore, on a different level of analysis than the school, an ILE itself. In turn, the student's stream of experiences has a continuity that is underpinned by integration. Thus, students being in an ILE will produce, in ideal circumstances, an integrated personality. Dewey (1963) has this to say about the connection of experiences to personality:

> A fully integrated personality exists only when successive experiences are integrated with one another. It can be built up only as a world of related objects is constructed. Continuity and interaction in their active union with each other provide the measure of the educative significance and value of an experience. (p. 44)

To further Dewey's argument, an integrated personality is one created in the context of an integrated environment, since this environment provides the instrumentalities through which successive experiences can be integrated. Integrated learning requires an integrated learning environment.

In an ILE, all aspects of human experience are valued and their enrichment is cultivated. To emphasize one dimension of human experience over another would lead to imbalance and fragmentation. Such a singular emphasis would be a disintegrating force. Hence, maintaining integration as a force in the learning environment necessitates a holistic approach to education. Integration in its fullest sense requires a holistic approach, an approach to education that nurtures all aspects of development--vocational, academic, and psychosocial. An ILE works to forge triangular links to these three elements (see figure 3).

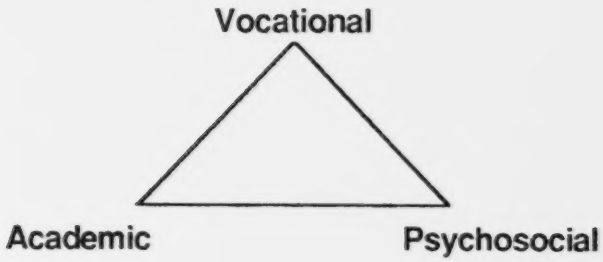


Figure 3. The integrated curriculum

The secondary educational system has experienced weaknesses in all three elements and has failed to consciously and dynamically forge links between all three aspects of experience--an oversight that is especially unfortunate since research in adolescent psychology indicates that progress in one area often aids and parallels progress in the other areas. To analyze this issue more thoroughly, there is a need to consider: (1) expanding teacher roles to promote psychosocial development, (2) giving more emphasis to career development in the curriculum, (3) bolstering basic skills instruction to ensure the acquisition of academic competencies that undergird the fundamental ability to "learn how to learn," and (4) setting up the expectancy that student progress and program success be evaluated along all three dimensions.

The research literature on dropout prevention has cited the importance of the three elements (Wehlage 1986). The labels chosen for the three components vary, but the message and its ultimate operationalization remain the same. It seems to be widely agreed that an integrated approach to dropout prevention, entailing experiential methods of instruction, development of occupational skills, and a collaborative effort among change agents is most effective. Wehlage has noted that the curriculum of an effective dropout prevention program balances academic, vocational, and experiential components. The examples that he describes to illustrate the latter component point up their strong psychosocial dimension: The experiential element may include non-paid work in a day care center or the renovation of old houses that will be sold to low-income families by a community agency. Wehlage concludes that key features of the curriculum of dropout prevention programs are individualization, close relationships between teachers and students, and the use of community work settings.

The Illinois Department of Education (1986) concurs with Wehlage. The department lists the following as characteristics of effective dropout prevention programs:

1. A high level of personal contact

2. Instructional methods that vary and are tailored to students' learning styles

3. Student tasks that are both challenging and feasible

4. Opportunities for students to demonstrate initiative and responsibility through experiential learning and work experience

Such programs are granted the autonomy and flexibility to try out innovative instructional strategies, involve youth more actively and more experientially in their own education, and expand teacher roles to include counseling and referral, advocacy, networking, and role modeling (Florida Department of Education 1986).

Each component, academic, vocational, and psychosocial, has been shown to be necessary to an effective dropout prevention effort, and it can be reasonably hypothesized that all three components are sufficient to an effective program. Nancy Peck, a state administrator in Florida, has recommended that educators teach a broad range of skills that are transferable in order to heighten the relevance of education. She has promoted an emphasis on employability skills, social skills, and problem-solving skills for dropout prevention programs in her state. The National Science Foundation (National Academy of Sciences et al. 1984) has suggested that all high school students develop these core competencies, which span all three dimensions: "The ability to read, write, reason, and compute; an understanding of American economic and social life; a knowledge of the basic principles of physical and biological sciences; experience with cooperation and conflict resolution in groups; and possession of attitudes and personal habits that make for a dependable, responsible, adaptable, and informed worker and citizen" (p. 19). The National Science Foundation (NSF) goes on to assert that "these competencies comprise what are needed to prepare a young person for an uncertain future." Note that the competencies apply to all youth regardless of their future plans. In fact, mastery of these core competencies will ensure a range of future options for students. The open-ended future is made possible by broadening the scope of learning to include not only minimal basic skills but also higher order thinking skills, social skills, and fundamental substantive knowledge.

Consistent with the NSF core competencies, successful retention programs focus on core content and provide students support for its mastery by either restructuring the standard curriculum or by adapting different teaching strategies in its presentation. Failure to provide alternative structures and learning environments would account to a large extent for the low achievement in basic academic skills for a growing body of high school students. Recent studies bolster the argument that out-of-school environments can be used effectively to develop academic skills. In fact, findings of research by Miguel and Crowe (1985) strongly indicate that the separation of school-based, subject-matter learning from its practice and application in real-life settings may be both pedagogically unsound and detrimental to learning retention in the long run. Therefore, the recent emphasis on more of the same basic skills content could miss the mark if it does not allow for applied learning contexts to reinforce academic learning.

This research suggests that the provision of work for the dropout-prone student will not, in and of itself, reduce the likelihood of dropping out. Rather, work experiences must be actively and closely tied to academic learning in order to manifest the educational potential of the experiences. Tying academic learning to vocational experience will create the perception in students that curricular offerings are

relevant to their future plans. This perception will maintain the interest and motivation needed to persist academically among dropout-prone students.

Indeed, this is true of all students, and it is generally recognized that making information relevant to the lives of students is an exemplary teaching practice. Students don't simply need information; they need information that is meaningful and knowledge that makes sense and becomes a part of their lives. Unless students are guided in trying to make a body of knowledge their own, they will not develop an intrinsic motivation to learn. Extrinsic motivation will only lead to a static form of learning, a learning always contingent on rewards and punishment from teachers, parents, and society. But the development of an intrinsic motivation to learn is far more suited to the present-day reality of lifelong learning, as required by a constantly changing workplace (Csikszentmihalyi and McCormack 1986).

The workplace of today also requires the use of problem-solving skills in groups and effective conflict resolution. Developing these skills best occurs in a setting where students are given opportunities to socially bond to adults who model behaviors that reveal these skills. Wehlage (1986) has argued that the alienation found among at-risk youth can be counteracted by adults giving them individualized attention to engage them in the school environment and to forge a link between life experiences and schooling. The emphasis on developing social skills in at-risk youth reflects the importance of the psychosocial dimension of dropout prevention.

Creating environments that enable students to assemble all three components (psychosocial, vocational, and academic) in producing a coherent and meaningful educational experience that spans the entire high school career strikes at the root of student boredom and alienation. All people have a basic desire to put things together in a coherent whole, but each person does this as an individual. Aspects of experiences are put together differently, and different aspects are manipulated in realizing life goals and are highlighted in the stream of consciousness. If educators are procrustean in their approach to education, they risk making education irrelevant to a large number of students. Educators should not be asking how they can put things together for students en masse in order to have continuity in the curriculum and teach what they deem is essential. Rather, educators should consider how they can give students the tools needed to put things together for themselves and impart a fundamental understanding of this process as it is embedded in the students' lived-through experiences. Basically, students must learn how to learn. The purpose of education, then, should not be to pass on a static body of education (because this body of knowledge in contemporary society is in constant flux, evergrowing, and too imposing in its immensity and diversity), but rather to develop a cluster of skills designed to teach students to learn how to learn. Such an essential education will involve the applied learning of academic concepts and a related use of integrated programs that combine vocational and academic instruction. Integrated learning is an outcome of programs that combine the psychosocial, academic, and vocational.

The instructional delivery systems associated with integrated learning have organizational features that differ from systems directed at traditional learning. Stufflebeam and Guga (1968) provide a conceptual model of instructional delivery systems. This model identifies the components necessary for the social structuring activities that assemble social structures in educational settings as content, methodology, and organization. In traditional instructional delivery systems, content is static and largely academic; the methodology centers on one-way communication, with the student as a passive recipient of sanctioned information from the teacher; and the

organization is the all-too-familiar one of an array of seated students before a teacher.

Romanish (1986) has remarked on how the design of the traditional instructional delivery system inhibits the cultivation of critical thinking. he discusses three impediments to the development of critical thought in particular. First, with respect to content, the school experience is artificial. It is the encounter with life itself that prompts one to question experience, and this questioning is the beginning of critical thought. Second, the lack of learner autonomy that underlies traditional teaching methodology blocks the empowering of students, which would give learners ownership over their thoughts. The last impediment concerns the organization of the classroom. Critical thinking is developed through meaningful dialogue, and such dialogue is made virtually impossible in overcrowded classes.

Hence, organizational changes are needed to create learning environments that promote critical thinking. These changes produce a more integrated learning environment. The features of an integrated instructional delivery system are different from a traditional one in terms of content, methodology, and organization. The content is passed on in a more career-focused curriculum that allows for personalization to interests and life goals. The methodology of teaching incorporates self-paced, competency-based instruction delivered in alternative modes to suit diverse learning styles. The organization of the classroom centers on establishing more collaborative relationships between teachers, students, parents, and the rest of the community. The instructional delivery system as a whole is directed toward student development in all domains and evaluation of student performance is based on holistic criteria. These changes are interventions that promote an ILE within the classroom.

Classroom as Workplace

The organizational features of an ILE overlap more with those of the "enlightened" workplace than the traditional classroom. The word "work" is meant in its noblest sense here: work is sustained activity directed at the fulfillment of a larger purpose linked to others. The link to others is created because of the exchange value of the goods produced or the services rendered. Hence, the work environment is largely product-driven and other-directed. This is in contrast to the traditional school environment, where the focus is person-centered and self-reflexive. Individual achievement and cognitive development are the valued ends in this traditional school context. The integrated learning environment falls between the two extremes. The ILE, like the traditional school, desires first the development of the individual (but, unlike the traditional school, considers all aspects of development and all dimensions of experience). On the other hand, the ILE, in considering all aspects of development, employs cooperative and experiential learning activities, which simulate a workplace. Hence, the ILE, from the perspective of the student, is perceived as a friendly or supportive workplace. On a school level, a secondary school that moves toward an ILE will establish the norms and expectations of the workplace and will set up experiential and cooperative learning opportunities as a part of simulating a workplace. It is, indeed, a simulation because it is not entirely product-driven, as an actual workplace is (see figure 4). Thus, in restructuring schools to increase retentive power, schools will become a locus for experiential and cooperative learning experiences.

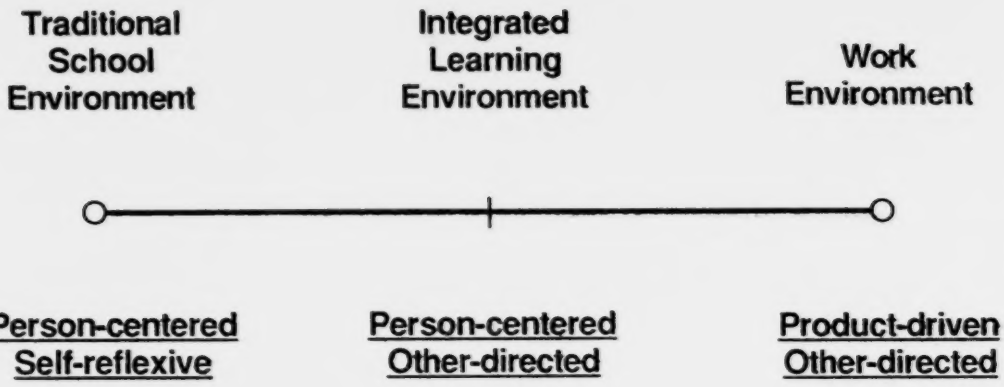


Figure 4. Continuum from traditional school environment to work environment

The most influential and eloquent champion of experiential and cooperative education has been Dewey (1963). The central purpose of education is growth in understanding and, according to Dewey, such growth is essentially growth in ability to formulate purposes and to select and arrange means for their realization. The exercise of this ability occurs in real-life, problem-solving situations that require the analysis of all relevant information and the synthesis of that information into a plan of action intended to solve the problem. Taking action and observing and remembering consequences of the action further understanding. The establishment of connections in the stream of experience extends and better articulates a field of knowledge. Knowledge then becomes not a fixed possession but rather "an agency and instrumentality for opening new fields which make new demands upon exciting powers of observation and of intelligent use of memory" (Dewey 1963). Experience that has educational significance builds upon prior experiences. From this perspective, learning is a continuous process of reconstruction of experiences. The educational richness of an experience then depends on the continuity that can be established with prior experiences and the interaction it has with other experiences in memory and action.

Such a philosophy of education makes intelligent action in problem-solving circumstances an integral part of the learning experience. The place of experiential and cooperative learning activities in this educational scheme is evident. Experiential education imbues a sense of how action creates understanding and how understanding enlightens action. Experiential education uses planned educational experiences to enable learners to acquire attitudes, skills, and knowledge by observing and performing work and other life roles in the actual environments where those roles normally are played out in the solving of everyday problems. Experiential education, then, entails linking students to the broader community outside of schools, where they have opportunities to experience firsthand the work of the community. Performance of these real-life roles and the maintenance of these linkages to the community necessitate cooperation on the part of the student, school, and community. For the students, this serves as a cooperative learning activity. Cooperation has been defined as a form of relationship "in which participants in a task gain benefits for themselves when they all act so as to maximize the performance of the common task" (Runkel and

Schmuck 1982, p. 750). Cooperative learning uses (1) cooperative task structures in which students spend much of their class time working in small heterogeneous groups and (2) cooperative incentive structures in which students earn recognition, rewards, or occasionally grades based on the academic performance of their group (Slavin 1983). Experiential modes of learning involving interpersonal interaction yield powerful combinations of cooperation and practical experience.

The combination of experiential and cooperative learning activities is a hallmark of the ILE on a classroom level. These activities are effective in relaying the symbols common to our culture to youth. Symbols are, necessarily, shared. Given the collective nature of symbols, it is natural that they should be passed on in an interpersonal setting, in the currency of discourse. But, as Piaget's thought attests, symbols are built up from schemata developed in acting on the environment. Symbols in Piaget's scheme of cognitive development are built up from cognitive structures that have emerged from remembered sequences of action. Thus, symbol mastery, the primary aim of education in the view of Boyer (1986), is made rich and full in the context of an ILE. Ideas debated and applied gain a weight of meaning not gained passively. Under ideal circumstances in an ILE, students develop a deep understanding that emerges from involvement in a field of action directed to the attainment of a common goal.

Students engaged in goal-directed behavior in cooperation with others experience a number of positive outcomes. The existence of other persons in the action setting heightens an emotional involvement that arises in an interpersonal setting. Further, the intrinsic reward of accomplishment is stronger if the successful actions are performed in the context of others, either actions toward those persons or in some other direct relationship to them in a realistic setting. Thus, experiential learning occurring in interpersonal contexts strengthens intrinsic motivation and bolsters self-esteem and a sense of mastery and competence (Coleman 1976).

The combination of experiential and cooperative learning activities also has certain classroom outcomes. Education, of course, should advance intelligence, and it is the work of intelligence to form purposes and organize the means to execute those purposes. Therefore, the educator, in striving to develop the intelligence of students, should expect the active participation of the learner in the formation of the purposes that direct his or her activities in the course of learning. The classroom becomes a task-oriented environment where time is allotted on the basis of how long it takes to complete a task, not on an arbitrary unit applied across learning situations. In addition to structuring the classroom experience around concrete tasks, the educator also "articulates" those tasks with others, i.e., other persons in the action setting rely on the performer of the task to complete the task so they can commence their own tasks. In this context, the teacher becomes a leader of group activities in the classroom. In the traditional classroom, the teacher kept order because order was in his or her keeping. In the classroom of the ILE, order resides in the shared work to be done.

Classrooms centering on experiential and cooperative activities reflect the culture of work. Making the school more like a supportive workplace will expose students to situations requiring cooperation and the task-oriented application of knowledge. The creation of these situations will entail the redefinition of teacher roles. It further entails linking to community resources and employing instructional strategies that are individualized, experiential, and cooperative. And changes in curricular content will reflect more of a life orientation.

Classrooms making these changes will increase the relevance of education by heightening the similarity of the school experience to the work experience. If school were made to be more like a workplace, two outcomes would be realized (1) the transition from a student role to an adult role would be easier since students would be exposed to the norms of a work setting and (2) a large number of students who are at risk of dropping out would be retained because they would be useful and would feel so. A closer integration of work and school would ensure that students would be prepared for lifelong learning. The academic curriculum would be infused into the vocational curriculum, and the vocational curriculum would vitalize academic learning. The result would be students who not only know concepts, but also how and when to apply them.

The integrated learning environment, then, addresses all forms of knowledge--substantive, procedural and conditional. The ILE challenges students to assemble all these forms by placing them in supportive work settings where workers (i.e., students) are expected to develop the basic tools necessary for a lifetime of learning in the workplace. One of the best ways for students to develop these tools is actually to place them in an environment that demands students to extract meaning from their experiences and apply the derived concepts to concrete situations. The relevance to the workplace is further heightened when those tasks are performed in the context of cooperative endeavors.

The increase of relevance of the school to the workplace will help prevent dropping out. Evidently many students are dropping out because they don't find school relevant to their interests, their life situations, or their future outcomes. So, school efforts need to be directed at establishing the relevance of school for all students. One way of establishing the relevance of school is to create classroom environments that simulate supportive work settings.

The Role of Vocational Education in Dropout Prevention

Vocational educators are primarily concerned with simulating supportive work settings in the classroom or at the work site. Thus, vocational education has a special contribution to make toward increasing the retentive power of schools. If the philosophy of vocational education (that is, the principles guiding it) were to pervade the schools, then schools would be a more attractive place for students, especially at-risk students. Educators need to transcend the mindset that vocational education is for students who can't meet the challenge of the academic program. An alternate view of vocational education is emerging that reinforces the notion of an ILE. Traditionally, outcomes of secondary vocational education were said to be the development of employability skills and job-specific skills in students to prepare for a direct path to work. But recent studies promote the view that vocational education can also be an alternate path to higher education. Laughlin (1986) reports that thirty percent of secondary vocational graduates enroll in 4-year colleges within 4 years after high school. An additional 30 percent enroll in technical schools and 2-year colleges. Of those who enroll in postsecondary programs, 60 percent graduate. Given the postsecondary educational experiences of many vocational students, vocational programs should prepare students not only for work, but also for higher education. An integrated curriculum can be developed for these students that creates deeper understanding by combining the practical skills offered by vocational education with the more theoretical, abstract skills of the academic curriculum (Seusy 1987).

In this expanded view of vocational education, it is seen that creating learning settings that are experiential and cooperative could be beneficial to all students. Naturally, there will be some students who, due to their own individual learning styles, will want proportionately more or less of these features in their learning settings. But given the diversity of students who attend American schools, educators must maximize the range of alternatives they offer so that each student has the resources to individualize his or her curriculum.

Furthermore, if students are to benefit from enriched learning opportunities, they must be in the school to seize those opportunities. To achieve this, schools need to implement policies discussed previously that (1) make it more convenient for students to attend and finish school (e.g., flexible scheduling; open exit, open-entry), (2) target at-risk students for the extra level of support that they may need to finish school, (3) rescind pushout policies, and (4) encourage attendance. In addition, schools will need to open up their boundaries and encourage businesses and community agencies to participate in the education of our youth. The consequences of expanding the circle of the school to encompass the community will be twofold (1) schools will become more responsive to the needs of families, businesses, and community leaders in preparing our youth for meaningful participation in our society as citizens, parents, and workers and (2) school will have a network of resources to deploy in addressing the problems that face youth today.

Changes in curriculum that incorporate more elements of vocational education and connections to the community that enhance educational opportunities will make school a more attractive place for all students. Making school more attractive will make school a place where youth want to be. It is in this larger perspective that administrators can view the dropout problem as indicative of a need for greater enrichment of secondary education, so efforts to address the dropout problem can be reconstrued as an effort to improve the quality of the high school experience for both students and teachers. From this perspective, system-wide dropout prevention efforts have a dual focus (1) the implementation of policies that heighten commitment to learning and (2) the articulation of the principles of vocational education in the curriculum that broaden the scope of learning.

Such a perspective leads to a reconceptualization of vocational education. Vocational education provides valuable educational experiences, not only because it teaches its students employability and job-specific skills, but also because it creates a unique learning setting, uses instructional strategies centering on concrete application, and engages a process of individuation for adolescents essential to their development. Expanding the scope of learning will serve to enhance vocational elements in education so that all students can be enriched by experiential and cooperative learning, which is the expertise of vocational educators.

This expanded notion of vocational education can guide change agents in creating environments with holding power. Schools or programs with holding power are those that make their environment like a friendly workplace. A successful dropout prevention effort will combine a simulated work environment with strong psychosocial support. When selecting among the multifarious dropout prevention strategies, administrators need to keep only one criterion in mind: "Will this strategy promote a supportive, work-like environment?" With this in mind, administrators can restructure their schools to increase holding power.

The rationale for restructuring schools in this way lies in the fact that the traditional school setting is unsuited to a large number of students, as evidenced in

the overwhelming dropout rate. Many students are in need of different learning settings than the school traditionally provides. Students ill-suited to a passive, lecture-format classroom may include the experiential learner who gains most in working in cooperative group settings. Indeed, one of the features of effective dropout prevention programs (which serve those who haven't adapted well to the traditional classroom) is their use of experiential and cooperative learning settings.

Thus, the model for restructuring is driven by vocational education, which has proven to be appealing to many students for a number of reasons. Vocational education programs tend to be small, which makes it possible for the teacher to provide individualized attention. These programs make a conscious effort to be relevant to the student. They are tailored to the students' Interests, abilities, and career aspirations. These programs allow for "hands-on" learning experiences, often occurring in a cooperative context. Most programs have an intangible "esprit de corps." The programs have a distinctive identity and relative autonomy. Often the vocational teacher employs a problem-solving, project method of instruction individualized to each student. There is also a movement in vocational education to use criterion-referenced standards of performance, and this movement has been identified with an improving of vocational education. Given the creation of such an appealing environment, it is not surprising that vocational education has been found to have a retentive effect (Mertens, Seitz, and Cox 1983).

Weber (1986) has carefully examined the factors relevant to retaining students in vocational education. He compares students who actually drop out to students who are likely to drop out and notes significant differences. His results indicate that dropouts earn fewer vocational and total credits, enroll in fewer courses, and don't explore a full range of vocational offerings. Those vocational courses they do take are largely "exploratory" (i.e., designed to provide an introduction to the vocational area rather than job-specific training). While in school, dropouts develop no vocational specialty, don't talk to friends .. family about school plans, spend more time at their jobs and earn more per hour, and feel that they were assigned to their school program rather than having chosen the program.

Based on these differences, Weber suggests that those who would actually drop out can be helped in a number of ways. First, identification should occur before the student makes a transition into high school, and reliable indicators should be used in the identification process. Such reliable indicators are derived from student-based decision rules. The indicators could include being overaged, lacking graduation plans that involve postsecondary education, moving a number of times since fifth grade (thereby reducing sense of attachment to school), and being introverted. Secondly, schools need to enhance the guidance and counseling services targeted to these students. Counseling needs to focus on program planning and assessment combined with follow-up remediation. The schools could provide more experiences to promote career exploration. The availability of such experiences, particularly prior to or near the transition point into high school, has the potential for helping dropout prone students more explicitly define their personal, school-related, and occupational goals/ objectives. Finally, "exploratory" courses should be offered as an early alternative, and when they are used, they should be integrated with the rest of the curriculum. This research establishes the need for school professionals to determine the features of vocational education that give it retentive power, enhance those features within the vocational education program, and extract from vocational education those features and generalize them to the entire school setting.

Indeed, those engaged in dropout prevention efforts have extracted these features from vocational education and employed them in the settings that they create. To illustrate, Hamilton has identified the following four characteristics of successful dropout prevention programs:

1. At-risk students are separated from other students, thereby promoting their cohesiveness as a group.

2. These programs have a vocational orientation.

3. They use out-of-classroom learning.

4. They are intensive in the sense of being small, individualizing instruction, having low student-teacher ratios, and offering more counseling than ordinary schools (Hamilton 1986).

From a review of the literature, one learns that a paradigm program is one with a supportive and cohesive teacher and peer culture, a curricular focus that uses the content and process of vocational education to motivate the learning of basic skills and gives direct and apparent relevance to education, and a program climate characterized by teachers' high expectations for students' success and clear and consistent rules for discipline (Cibulka n.d.). Others have echoed these characteristics with some modifications. According to Wehlage (1986), features of effective programs for at-risk students are "small size that facilitate teacher effectiveness, an explicitly caring approach to students, and innovative approaches to teaching and learning that include individualization, experiential learning, and work experiences." The Center for Dropout Prevention (1987) in Florida surveyed practioners in that state and they attributed program success to--

1. concrete, practical and immediate learning goals;
2. expanded and nontraditional student roles;
3. doing something useful for others (making a real contribution); and
4. commitment to, and pride in, the program.

The overarching goal of these programs is to help students overcome the frustrations that make them vulnerable to dropping out by providing them with a supportive environment where they can experience success and a feeling of belonging. This is similar in nature and consequence to vocational education programs.

Cooperative and experiential learning is essential to both dropout prevention efforts and vocational education. There are a group of students not presently being served by our educational system because their learning styles are not accommodated by traditional modes of instruction. Gadwa and Griggs (1985) have examined the learning styles of dropouts. The findings point up the necessity of providing students with an array of learning settings. With regard to cooperative learning, they found that "dropouts prefer to learn with peers rather than alone [which] indicates that small group projects with interdependent tasks are preferable to assignments in which the individual works alone" (p. 15). The conduct of the typical classroom does not usually entail working with others in a group motivated by a common goal. Yet many students, especially at-risk students, need to feel a group identity in order to establish a motivational context for learning and to reduce feelings of alienation. Experiential learning is also crucial: "Successful dropout prevention programs allow teachers to work one-on-one with students in hands-on educational experiences that create new

interest in school." Thus, the principles of cooperative and experiential learning that guide vocational education are also the principles articulated in successful dropout prevention efforts.

Further evidence establishing the role of vocational education in dropout prevention comes from practioners. Project COFFEE, a dropout prevention program in Oxford, Massachusetts, involves vocational education stressing training and internships, along with an opportunity for hands-on experience (Project COFFEE n.d.). In addition, the curriculum is self-paced and individualized with a strong emphasis on basic skills. Carlos Azcoitia, a superintendent from the Chicago Public School System, and Philip A. Viso evaluated a program that provided vocational education to ninth graders. Their findings are as follows (Azcoitia and Viso 1987):

> Students who have goals and students enrolled in career-vocational programs are less likely to drop out than those in traditional school programs. In an experiment, all freshman students were placed in a vocational program for a minimum of one year. The dropout rate for the period of the experiment was reduced from 24 percent annually to six percent, with the only variable being enrollment of the students. (p. 33)

This result suggests that vocational education, not simply as a program, but as an approach to education can benefit all students by clarifying their future goals and the relation of educational attainment to achieving those goals.

In the past, vocational education programs have been evaluated according to whether students have landed the jobs which they were trained after graduating. Using this criterion, many programs would be considered to be performing poorly. However, the teachers in these programs sense that the program is successful. They may feel as though the evaluators have failed to capture the beneficial effects on students participating in their programs. The research on dropout prevention may indicate an explanation. The end result of vocational education may not be a particular job, but rather increased self-esteem. Vocational education is giving students opportunities to experience success and a sense of belonging that they may not have had in the academic or general education tracks. Such opportunities enhance students' self-concept. The program may also be creating experiential and cooperative learning settings that promote interpersonal life skills, positive work attitudes, and basic skills acquisition. A vocational education program cannot be solely evaluated on eventual job placement. Educators must also consider the ways vocational education advances adolescent development in all domains--social, intellectual, and emotional.

The similarity between features of vocational education and dropout prevention efforts intimates a larger role for vocational education in America's educational system. The magnitude of the dropout problem and the demographic changes that will exacerbate it implicate a systemic solution. Schools as a whole will need to increase their holding power. The research cited above suggests that the way to increase a school's holding power is to make the school like a friendly workplace. That is, schools need to simulate a work environment that provides strong psychosocial support. Gayle (n.d.) has articulated this agenda for high schools: "The time is right for taking the leadership role in determining new directions and actions for restructuring the high school model and to integrate academics and technical education for all students" (p. 5).

Thus, desired outcomes for vocational education in restructuring schools include the blending of academic and vocational curricula, continued and further

individualization for students in vocational education, the promotion of cohesiveness within programs, and the use of experiential and cooperative learning opportunities. It is important to realize that restructuring moves in two directions:

1. From vocational education to the school program: extract from vocational education those features that are effective in dealing with at-risk students and generalize them to the entire school setting

2. From the school program to vocational education: heighten commitment to learning through policy changes and leadership so that students come to school in order to benefit from the enriched school environment

So the outcomes for vocational education are not limited to a program level, but expanded to a school level. This approach demands that educators view vocational education as content and process that may be abstracted from a particular program setting.

The desired outcomes for students in this expanded vocational education do not simply relate to the development of job-specific skills, but rather center on the inducing of a set of competencies in students that prepare them to respond flexibly and constructively to the changing workplace. Such competencies include problem solving, decision making, and interpreting of texts and motives. These competencies are best learned and assessed by hands-on activities. Vocationally related tasks can be developed that embed these competencies.

These desired student outcomes of the expanded vocational education are appropriate for all learners. Educators have known for quite a while that most people are not naturally passive learners, but rather active assimilators of information relevant to problem-solving situations. But it seems that our educational system has not caught up with this human reality. Vocational education, on the other hand, has effectively operationalized and institutionalized this notion of the student as active learner. Practices in vocational education serve to replicate a supportive, worklike setting in the classroom. The institution of such practices should be part of the structural changes made to increase the retentive power of schools. For students, this would mean that they assume productive roles in school. For staff, it means that they will cultivate each student's unique contribution and have high expectations for each student's success.

Conclusion

Students can't find integrity in their educational experience if the learning environment itself is not integrated. This is especially true for poor students; middle-class and upper-class students see their parents use their education. The home environment of most middle-class and upper-class students promotes the integrity of the school experience. For poor students, school may be their only opportunity to work toward integrity; for middle-class and upper-class students, school can be a place to complement and reinforce the effort to find integrity in their educational experience. Restructuring school in such a way that integration--personally, socially, and academically--is cultivated will benefit all students, of all socioeconomic backgrounds.

Part of the rationale for restructuring schools derives from their weak retentive power. Almost 3 out of 10 students are dropping out. Many are dropping out,

evidently, because they don't find that school is relevant to them. Schools, then, will need to consciously and actively forge a link between school and life experiences to retain more students. At present, the school experience is only relevant to a minority of students: white, middle-class students who are college-bound (and even this group is showing signs of dissatisfaction, as indicated by the rising suicide rate among middle-class high school students.)

Our society, then, is confronted with the challenge of making school a relevant experience for all. The school system has responded in the past to new demands. Traditionally, school only fulfilled needs for intellectual stimulation and growth. With the rise of vocational education during the early 1900s, schools expanded their narrow scope to encompass the provision of job training and the teaching of employability skills to satisfy a growing demand for skilled labor. Schools now face the challenge of increasing their role still further. Again, this challenge has presented itself because of the changing needs of the students passing through our educational system.

But there are trends in school organizations that portend the meeting of this challenge. A movement toward competency-based instruction opens up opportunities for individualization and self-pacing--a movement that will benefit both the proficient learner and the slower learner. Educators are discussing the expansion of teacher roles: teacher as counselor, as mentor, as learning resource person, and as coordinator of individual learning plans. More and more, schools are employing cooperative and experiential learning settings to enrich and motivate the process of students' Education. All these trends are converging to prefigure a restructuring of the school that would increase its holding power, making school a richer experience for those who would make it through in any case, and retaining those who would otherwise slip through the cracks.

These trends will intervene directly in the conduct of the classroom. Those interventions closely related to classroom outcomes include the expansion and redefinition of teacher roles, a more career-focused curriculum, competency-based instruction often occurring in applied learning contexts, and a holistic evaluation of student performance. Making these interventions will increase the supportiveness of schools.

If a school is actively supporting a student in all areas of development and all aspects of life, then the student's commitment to the learning process will be heightened. The student's ownership of the school and, therefore, the activities occurring there will be increased. Addressing all aspects of development will also broaden the scope of learning, thereby making that learning more relevant to the student's life.

CHAPTER 10

CHANGING TEACHER ROLES

The research literature indicates that dropout-prone students have low self-esteem, poor self-concepts, and an externalized locus of control. No linear causal relationship exists between low self-esteem and dropping out, but low self-esteem, in combination with other factors, will predispose a student to dropping out. Not all students with low self-esteem will drop out, but almost all students will have low self-esteem at the point of dropping out.

Sol Gordon, a psychologist from Syracuse University, has studied the nature of low self-esteem and techniques to preserve and promote self-esteem. Two characteristics, he asserts, distinguish low self-esteem. Individuals with low self-esteem (1) identify with the person having low expectations and (2) have a low tolerance for frustration (due to a high anxiety level). The areas of frustration in these young people's lives include family, school, and economic and social conditions. The agents having low expectations may include parents, teachers, peers, employers, school administrators, and members of society in general. These agents are factors in depressing self-esteem (Gordon and Everley n.d.).

The theoretical perspective of social interactionism helps in understanding the mechanism operating here. George Mead, the seminal thinker of this view, suggested that self-concept is a composite of others' perceptions of who we are. In other words, we are who others say we are, and our "individuality" is constructed out of the roles we play in a social arena. Of course, those with power have far more influence in molding the identity of young people. In the context of oppression, we find that the oppressed internalize the views of the oppressors. If we feel badly about ourselves, we are (or have been) in an alienating environment. Thus, low self-esteem on a psychological level is paralleled on a sociological level by alienation.

Dropout-prone students have a background of negative experiences with school. Experiences at several levels create alienation. Young people who are neglected or abused at home identify themselves with their parents' low estimation of them. These parents inculcate low educational aspirations in their children. Teachers may reinforce this by having low expectations for the students' academic performance and behavior. Students then come to expect little of themselves. Peers who are in the "in-group" define many dropout-prone students as in the "out-group." The "in" peers do not see the dropout-prone student (perhaps accurately) as being academically capable or athletically inclined. The "out" peer does not see himself or herself as being a valued member of the school community. This is reflected and reinforced in the broader school culture. A school culture that devalues other accomplishments over academic ones exclude from vital and productive membership those students who have skills and interests that are nonacademic or goals that do not include postsecondary education but employment. Subsequently, many at-risk students come to devalue themselves in the context of the school community. Given this low estimation of themselves, it becomes vitally important in any dropout prevention effort to bring at-risk students to value themselves. A successful effort strives to develop a personal assessment of worthiness in the student. Students should come to see themselves as capable, significant, and successful. Students can come to learn how to give themselves approval by being around those who approve and those who provide success experiences. This learning can counteract the feelings associated with low self-esteem: feelings of isolation, defenselessness, and being unloved. At-risk students must have opportunities to learn

something new and experience success. Pride in learning can either be achieved by dropping the formal curriculum for a while or by making the formal curriculum more manageable. Once self-confidence is enhanced, at-risk students will be better able to return to the rigors of the formal curriculum and successfully meet its challenges.

At all times, the focus should be on developing strategies that enhance the self-esteem of students, even if this means deemphasizing strictly academic goals for a short period. The focus is then shifted to issues of adolescent development. The cultivation of attachments to significant adults is crucial to supporting this development. At-risk students don't have strong attachments to adults. Thus, any dropout prevention effort will include opportunities for these students to socially bond to adults. This social bonding will foster a commitment to participating in adult society.

The teacher is, of course, one adult to whom students will socially bond. Studies have highlighted the importance of providing students with opportunities to bond with teachers. Students will bond with teachers (and feel attachment to school in general) when teachers have high expectation of them; and teachers will bond to students when their working conditions are favorable. Naturally, this bonding reduces the likelihood of dropping out. The study of Felice and Richardson (1977) substantiates the role of high expectations. They discovered that minority students are least likely to drop out when bused to schools of higher social class with teachers holding high expectations; and they are most likely to drop out when bused into less affluent districts, where they encounter teachers with relatively low expectations. The working conditions of teachers also have an effect on the dropout rate. Carranza (1975) found positive correlations of the dropout rate with increases in the number of students in a class, the number of classes taught by individual teachers, and the number of teacher job moves and transfer requests. It is difficult for teachers to bond with students when their classes are overcrowded, their schedules are overloaded, and their own attachment to the school is low.

The impact of teachers' attitudes and work conditions on student retention has been a concern of dropout prevention programs. A positive teacher culture has been noted to be just as essential to an effective program as a positive student culture; in fact, the two go hand in hand (Wehlage 1986). Administrators have observed that a trained, committed staff is the most vital element in the success of dropout prevention programs. A strong sense of collegiality within these programs makes teaching more enjoyable and professionally stimulating. The belief system of the teacher culture includes a faith that all students can learn and a commitment to an expanded role, working with the student as a whole person. Teachers who are effective in these programs are--

- o approachable,
- o flexible in their approach to curriculum,
- o open to new ideas,
- o good team players with other staff,
- o supportive and warm,
- o active listeners, and
- o fair and consistent in their discipline.

The teacher who works successfully with the at-risk student shows concern and care for each student, displays understanding, and conveys high expectations. The teacher also presents clear and achievable objectives in the classroom, gives prompt feedback, and provides concrete evidence of progress to the student. Effective teaching strategies

for at-risk students set up active, experiential roles for students in learning. The teacher who is successful with at-risk students will provide concrete success experiences for students and frequently praise achievements.

To help teachers develop these characteristics in working with the dropout-prone student, some schools have started training programs. Training intended to improve those skills reflected in effective classroom management will serve to better retain dropout-prone students. Two essential skills involve (1) establishing and clearly communicating rules and (2) clearly communicating standards of classroom performance. Other training programs have promoted the sensitivity of teachers to the need of low achieving students for the recognition of effort. Project TESA researchers found that most teachers give students viewed as high achievers more opportunities to answer questions than students viewed as low achievers. During training sessions, teachers are made aware of this behavior, reasons for it are discussed, and exercises are done to help teachers ask for responses from students in a more equitable manner. Following the sessions, participants observe each other in the classroom, and feedback is provided for each teacher to improve their interaction. A high school in Downey, California, has had great success in implementing Project TESA: a 3-year study reveals significant academic gains and a reduction in absenteeism (Association of California Urban School Districts 1985).

Counselors have an important role to play in helping teachers effectively cope with the affective dimensions of the dropout problem. Counselors can develop the counseling skills of teachers. Counselors can also increase teachers' awareness of how their behavior impacts students. Teachers can learn how to communicate with their students as equals and, correspondingly, modify their often inappropriate adult/child interactions with high school students.

These interventions don't actually require "more" from teachers, they simply redefine relationships that teachers have to others. An effective dropout prevention effort will require that teachers work with others in new and closer ways. The overarching goals in changing teacher roles is (1) the facilitation of the social bonding of teachers to students and (2) the empowerment of teachers in creating their own work conditions. These goals can be met, in part, through training. But, over and above training, teachers can be allowed to fundamentally restructure their classrooms to work in more innovative and closer ways to others.

Some of the changes that teachers can make in restructuring the classroom include the following:

- Teachers can work with each other in new ways. Teachers may join efforts in integrating vocational and academic instruction, or they may constitute a team that helps individual at-risk students. Teachers could also engage in more participatory decision making in planning for classroom organization in terms of task structure, incentive structure, time, and articulation between subjects.

- Teachers can relate to students in new ways. A teacher may learn counseling skills through inservice training and thereby be enabled to deal with the student as a whole person. Or a teacher may reconstrue the role of teacher as coordinator of personalized learning activities (perhaps in the context of cluster programs or a school-within-a-school). A teacher may even be simply the director of a peer tutoring program, teaching students how to do a teacher's job.

- o Teachers can use and coordinate community resources in new ways. This role may come into play when enriching a student's educational experiences with out-of-school learning opportunities. Or it could be the rationale for making a visit to the home of a troubled student. Using community resources may even include collaboration with social service agencies.

These new ways of teachers relating to each other, students, and the community will serve to enrich and strengthen the school program, in addition to increasing student retention.

The Affective Dimensions of Dropping Out

A major reason for changing teacher roles lies in the need to address the emotional issues of youth. Teachers connecting in new ways will reconnect at-risk students. Students will then feel a sense of belonging and self-acceptance. One researcher in Minneapolis found that emotional issues played a prominent role in dropping out. Linda Hall Harris, a social worker, asked 140 students from several middle-class suburbs in Minneapolis about their life histories. She found that dropout-prone students were far more likely than other students to have gone through a traumatic life experience. More than half of those who were dropout-prone had experienced a death of an immediate family member or close friend, but only 19 percent of successful students had experienced a similar loss. Half the dropout-prone (as opposed to 16 percent of others) reported that at least on one occasion a parent had inflicted visible injury when disciplining them. One-third of the dropout-prone girls (versus 9 percent of the other girls) acknowledge being forced into an incestuous relationship. Thus, 67 percent of the dropout-prone students (those who were flunking or dropping out of high school) had been traumatized by a death or abuse, either physical or sexual. Such psychiatric distress can sap a student's motivation to complete high school. These emotional factors can be especially important in explaining dropping out among middle-class students (*Psychology Today* 1980).

Students who are likely to drop out have not only often suffered personal traumas, but they also often have a history of failure, humiliation, and ridicule in the classroom. The classroom has become a threatening place. These students have grown to be so inured to failure that newly experienced success can be frightening. They develop defensive maneuvers to forestall disappointment at another failure. Such maneuvers include displays of aggression, a passive refusal to attempt work, and joking. Teachers need to see beyond these maneuvers and understand the pain and frustration that underlie them.

Teachers can aid dropout prevention efforts by showing understanding of the emotional difficulties that students experience in school and out of school. These difficulties may impede school functioning by impairing concentration and lowering motivation. A list of at-risk indicators can sensitize teachers to the problems that may beset students and diminish the likelihood of school completion. At-risk students tend to have the following characteristics:

- o A high rate of absenteeism and truancy
- o A low participation in extracurricular activities
- o Basic skills deficiencies
- o Difficulty with higher order thinking skills
- o Overage
- o Low tolerance for structured activities
- o Lower occupational aspirations than their peers
- o Socially isolated
- o Tendency to prefer physical over mental activities
- o External locus of control
- o Bored in school
- o History of academic failure
- o Lack of program planning and clearly defined life goals
- o Frequent movement from school to school
- o Expressed feelings of alienation, powerlessness, and meaninglessness
- o Difficulty in communicating with teachers and students
- o Poor self-concept
- o Deficient support systems
- o Credit deficient
- o Behavioral problems and poor impulse control
- o Siblings are also dropouts
- o Low SES
- o Minority background

In helping students burdened by these and other problems, the teacher can build a strong relationship with the student and offer support.

Teacher as Counselor

Traditionally, teachers have emphasized the cognitive development of students over other developmental areas. But more recently, educators have developed techniques and materials that facilitate students' development of self-awareness, self-esteem, emotional expressivity, attitudes, and relationships to others. Educators have also made efforts to facilitate the development of career awareness, career development, and vocational preparation. Such efforts will help in redressing the imbalance in the curriculum by furthering vocational and personal development.

Failure to address these other developmental areas can result in decreasing the perceived relevance of the educational process to everyday life. Inadequate counseling, in all its forms, contributes to the inability to connect school to adult life, and this may precede the dropout's decision to leave school. Guidance and advisement can address individual problems at home or at school. Such problems may promote poor attendance, often a precursor to dropping out. When learning is treated as both an intellectual and emotional process, students become more deeply engaged in school and teachers are able to participate in interactions that generate internally binding norms and values in students (Csikszentmihaly and McCormack 1986). This more holistic approach to educational practice will make apparent to students the relevance of school to life.

Teachers may need training in communication and human relations to help guide students through the emotional aspects of learning, since they are accustomed to only focusing on intellectual aspects. Project Intercept of the Ossining (New York) Public Schools is an exemplary program that fulfills this training need. The four major

elements of the program implemented at Ossining High School were (1) training over half of the faculty (who volunteered) in classroom management, discipline, and instructional techniques; (2) alternative programs for high-risk, potential dropouts; (3) group counseling courses to develop students' interpersonal behavior and self-knowledge; and (4) family intervention and parental training for families of students having difficulty in school. Peer critiques of teaching were included in this project, which resulted in the emergence of a mutual support system. Teachers also received training in group counseling. Ossining was able to cut its dropout rate from 6.04 percent to 3.3 percent over 3 years with this program (Maurer 1982).

The assumption of some counseling functions by teachers is also the thrust of the PASS (Positive Alternatives to Student Suspensions) program. The PASS program of the National Diffusion Network in California consults with school faculties to assist them in developing techniques for dealing effectively with teenage students. Some activities sponsored by the PASS program include affective education and personal development programs for students and teachers, time-out rooms managed by a teacher or paraprofessional where students talk out problems and get help in completing academic assignments, and individual and group counseling for students involved in serious interpersonal conflicts. The PASS program also provides training for communication activities in the regular classroom to help students and teachers come to an appreciation and understanding of each other (Association of California Urban School Districts 1985).

This insight into each other will have only potential value if it does not inspire action. Action that extends from and enriches understanding should center on engaging students in a mutual problem-solving process, which is the essence of counseling. A variety of skills is embedded in carrying out this process. Communication skills are vital throughout the entire process. A teacher who is an active listener can aid students in identifying and defining problems. Recognition of problems entails setting goals, since problems are seen as problems when obstacles are presented to goal attainment. Regular goal setting and review sessions can be scheduled with students, and students can be recognized and rewarded for having reached their goals. Such efforts can increase the understanding of the problems of the student and his or her situation. This understanding can aid a decision-making process concerning goals and actions. Beyond explicit goal setting for students, students need to develop an understanding of the consequences of their behavior. A student cannot make good decisions unless the consequences of behavior are known and the student has standards by which to assess the desirability of those consequences. Thus, much of the counseling that the teacher does concerns the development of higher order thinking skills, and this is consistent with the teacher's instructional role as well. Holistic teaching enhances the ability to make decisions and solve problems through the recognition and understanding of alternatives and consequences in all dimensions of student life.

Holistic teaching can be practiced in many ways. Teachers can collaborate with mental health agencies in conducting counseling groups, initiate peer counseling, set up counseling rooms, pair up with individual students to be advocates and mentors, and increase parental involvement through home visits and meetings in school. Many dropout-prone students have deficient support systems, so peer support groups and teacher mentoring are especially effective in addressing the dropout problem. In some Florida high schools, peer support groups are formed upon the entry of young people into high schools. These groups include students with varied achievement backgrounds. Students sign a contract stating that they agree to help each other academically, to encourage each other to attend school, and to support each other in resolving problems

that hurt school performance. These groups offer students the opportunity to develop a sense of belonging and usefulness by creating a nonthreatening environment where students exchange healthy experiences and relate constructively to their peers (Florida Department of Education 1986).

Students can also link with teachers to create a support system. In Florida, some schools are assigning each student to a teacher who advises and counsels that student on school-related matters. Teacher "advocates" in California meet with counselors regularly (California State Department of Education 1986). Thus, counselors and teachers develop better networks in order to improve the networks between teachers and students. This activity clearly promotes the integration of the school environment, thereby reducing feelings of alienation and anonymity most keenly experienced by at-risk students.

Students are motivated to attend school either because they know another person or group will care whether they attend or because the student feels that he or she has something to accomplish in going to school. The former is provided by support systems developed in school; the latter by relating instruction in school to student goals, interests, and needs. Instruction can be made more relevant for students by involving them in work-study programs, placing them in jobs (and explicitly connecting work experiences to education), providing career education that influences the student's perception of the relevance of the curriculum, and using instructional strategies that employ problem-solving, real-life examples and small work groups. Teachers can also help students develop Individualized Career Plans (ICPs).

Such career plans can be linked with program planning. The guidance needs of most dropouts, especially program planning, are not adequately addressed either at home or at school. A study by Weber (1986) reveals that significantly fewer 10th-grade dropouts than completers reported discussing their high school plans with their parents or any "significant other" in their lives. Few dropouts (29 percent) and dropout-prone students reported discussing their high school plans with either a counselor or their teachers. Program planning can be improved for at-risk students through careful interest and ability assessment and vocational program awareness. Program planning that is consciously directed at laying the foundation for the fulfilling of life goals is program planning that establishes the clear relevance of schooling. This planning will open up opportunities that students never before imagined, help them to seize those opportunities, and aid them in learning how those opportunities can fulfill meaning for them.

Students may need help in understanding the seriousness of their decisions--that is, the impact that certain decisions may have in terms of expanding or constricting opportunities. There are some New York City high schools where students who want to drop out find it a mere paperwork procedure. The students are readily discharged into a world void of the expected opportunities. None are informed that New York State has a GED pass rate below 50 percent and that it is difficult to get into military service without a diploma. No student is told that the business schools in which many enroll have a very high dropout rate. Thus, most of those students who decide to drop out are not aware of how limited their opportunities are as a consequence of that decision (Fine 1986).

This lack of awareness highlights the need for developing programs for teaching the consequences of dropping out. High schools can make an effort to educate students about the consequences of dropping out in a nonjudgmental, objective way. In assessing the advantages and disadvantages of dropping out with a student, an educator should

validate the student's frustration with school and the reasons for considering this course of action. The educator can also help the student conceptualize and articulate the intrapersonal and interpersonal dynamics that led the student to consider dropping out. The educator can aid the student in defining the request to drop out as an important turning point in the student's school career; use this request as an opportunity to listen to factors in making the decision; advise the student in a supportive, nonthreatening way on the consequences of lacking a high school diploma in a labor market characterized by escalating credentialism; and make referrals and create linkages for the student regardless of his or her ultimate decision.

A well-targeted effort to heighten a student's awareness of opportunities, consequences of decisions, and resources will help that student make decisions that promote growth. Students who are dropout-prone need to identify background stressors, coping skills, and available support systems to be able to generate a number of possible alternative responses to problematic life circumstances that increase the likelihood of dropping out. In their desperation and frustration, students may fail to consider all options. Educators can help students gain the perspective on their circumstances that they will need to make sound decisions.

Self-awareness is integral to any decision-making process. Some schools, guided by this concept, have developed dropout prevention programs that focus on the promotion of self-awareness. These programs help students determine their own needs, develop their life purpose, adjust to others, or assess their own potentials and interests. The Quest National Center of Columbus, Ohio, has developed a curriculum that prompts students to explore issues of adolescent life. This curricular material, called "Skills for Adolescence," although intended for early adolescents, may also be effective with dropout-prone high school students. The learner outcomes associated with "Skills for Adolescence" include the following:

- Increased understanding of changes that are normal in adolescence
- The development of critical thinking skills for decision making
- The recognition and acceptance of emotions
- The conscious and active connection of classroom learning with personal development
- The strengthening of self-confidence and self-acceptance
- The building of skills to resist peer pressure

These learner outcomes are produced in a group context. By exploring these issues in a group, students come to feel connected to a group of caring peers and adults. They no longer feel alone and utterly unique in their experiences and feelings. This development of a support system, in addition to involvement in community service, promotes meaningful relations to others and, therefore, reduces feelings of alienation (Gerler 1986).

Another program cultivates group feelings among students, but concentrates on individual goal setting and the monitoring of student progress instead of the exploration of general adolescent issues. Clackamas High School in suburban Portland, Oregon, offers a personal development course for its at-risk students. Students are

given individual conferences to help them establish goals and determine quantifiers to use in assessing progress toward those goals. In group, each student scores all goals weekly. They take turns going around the circle presenting scores, providing explanations of the scores, and accepting congratulations for progress or, at least, perseverance. Other students give support, provide encouragement, and offer constructive suggestions for improvement. One rule for group conduct is absolute: No put-downs. As a result of this course and the school's commitment to dropout prevention, Clackamas High School's yearly dropout rate decline from 7 percent in the previous year to 5 percent in the year of program inception. This positive impact on students was attributed to the regular conferencing, daily group meetings, and goal setting and monitoring (Conrath 1984).

The effectiveness of this program points up the importance of a counseling approach to dropout prevention. Teachers can hone their counseling skills to better meet the needs of at-risk students. Essential skills are active listening, problem solving, and decision making. Counseling can be delivered in many different modes: individual, group, and peer counseling. Teachers can also advance their students' personal development by including in the curriculum the tasks and problems of living. The instructional strategies employed to teach this curriculum entail active problem-solving learning methods.

The counseling skills, curriculum, and instruction are applied to areas of vocational counseling (where efforts are made to tentatively define career goals and sketch out a career plan), affective counseling (where active listening skills are vital), and counseling for transitions (where decision-making skills are crucial). It is also important for teachers to learn how to lead peer support groups, since peers are an important component of any youth's support system. The ultimate goal of a counseling approach is to strengthen the youth's support system so that it is easier to cope with problems.

Team Approach to Helping At-Risk Students

Some students need a greater level of support than other students due to life circumstances and academic problems. They face challenges in school that can overwhelm them and prompt them to drop out. The traditional school system often does not respond to the difficulties that can impair the functioning of at-risk youth. To serve these students, schools must create a highly supportive environment for them: an environment where they feel that they belong and where they can experience success.

The reasons for dropping out vary widely from student to student. The supportive milieus that schools can offer vary from school to school. Such variability suggests that there is a need to tailor efforts to retain a student to that student's needs and the resources of the school, district, and community. Therefore, each student must be managed as an individual case, given the school and community context.

This argument lends support to an "individual differences" approach to the dropout problem. Here one looks at the dropout problem as composed of unique problems possessed by students individually so that individualized attention and specific, context-bound problem solving is required to adequately respond to the overall dropout problem. Under this approach, there isn't actually **a** dropout problem; rather, there are particular students at risk of dropping out because of their own unique circumstances. Delivery of services is then targeted to individual students in a counseling and classroom setting.

This perspective emphasizes the importance of schools and programs having a small size and a caring, committed staff. More counseling is made available for psychosocial support and aid in decisionmaking during critical incidents. It is vital to give support in decision making at the period when a plan to drop out is formulated, an intention to drop out stated, or other warning signs of potentially dropping out given. This approach embodies on-going assessment of pupil progress and prompt feedback on student performance. All programs described as effective in the literature operationalize the "individual differences" approach by providing individualized attention, curriculum, and instruction.

One set of programs in particular uses an individual differences approach. They can be referred to as "case management" programs. Individual case management refers to a helping process entailing the following stages:

- o Client-counselor assessment of needs and problems
- o Identification of short-term and long-term goals
- o Development of a contract specifying a plan of action
- o Implementation of the plan through the mobilization of resources and services
- o Evaluation of progress and modification of the plan based on this evaluation

To institute such attention, the school can set up a system whereby a vulnerable student is referred to a staff member (e.g., a school social worker, counselor, or teacher), and the staff person is assigned a case management function for that student (such a person can be called a case manager.)

The case manager should be a person sensitive to the characteristics of vulnerable students, knowledgeable about changes that can be made in the school environment and options that exist within it, and capable of advocating for at-risk students and coordinating services offered by the school and the community. To effectively coordinate services, the case manager should be the leading member of a team that is brought together to help the student. The team may consist of a mentor from the community, a counselor, a teacher, other-than-professional staff, bus driver or janitor, for example: anyone who cares, has contact with the student, and can provide fresh and enlarging perspectives on the student's circumstances. The case manager is also responsible for insuring that the student is being rendered all the services needed--such as health care, mental health, family support, guidance and counseling, and academic remediation.

New York City has created the position of case manager in many of its high schools. The model of comprehensive case management is implemented in these schools by having a team of concerned professionals step through a logical, problem-solving sequence of interactions within a service network directed at maximizing the opportunity for a student to receive needed services in a supportive, timely, and efficient manner. In each team, the case manager insures that the needs of individual students are being met, that students receive the most appropriate mix of services, and that the services are coordinated.

Each of these schools in New York City has contracted with one or more community-based organizations to provide a team of four or five human services workers within the school. Both the particular combination of workers and the community-based organization selected is based on the greatest needs of the at-risk students within that school. The team includes some mix of the following: a social worker, an attendance liaison, a family outreach worker, a substance abuse counselor, an employment counselor, a job developer, a family health practioner, and a remediation specialist.

The team provides individualized treatment for each student through referral and the actual delivery of services (Case Nabagenebt--A Comprehensive Service Approach to Dropout Prevention)

A program in Dade County, Florida, also provides services to youth at risk of dropping out through a team approach. The team works with students to deliver counseling, provide some form of academic enhancement, and heighten career awareness through employability skills classes. A team consists of counselors, teachers, and an occupational placement specialist. Evaluation of the "Project Trio" programs in 11 senior high schools and 7 junior high schools in the Miami district revealed an important key to the success of a team approach. Those Trio projects that provided services on an "as needed" basis made no significant impact on the dropout rate. But those projects that regularly scheduled individual or group tutoring and counseling were successful. Evidently, the provision of continuous support and constant vigilance is crucial to retaining students (US GAO 1987).

Case management delivered through a team is a powerful tool in dropout prevention for a number of reasons. The team brings a diversity of perspectives to the problems confronting the student. The teamwork then offers greater opportunity for broadened and more comprehensive programming. The team also builds a support system and assembles a variety of resources and services for the student. The team heightens the supportiveness and responsiveness of the school to a student's circumstances. This will both increase the student's sense of belongingness to the school and promote collegiality among professionals involved in the school. The team, therefore, helps create a feeling of community in the school.

Alternative Organizational Arrangements

In 1984, Earline Levicy, recalling the classes she taught in an urban high school, said:

> The bell rings. You've got 38 kids in the class. If you have 30, it's a teacher's dream. Fifteen of them are cutting up. Five of them are coming in late and you've got to handle paperwork for them, write out passes, or whatever. Of course, you don't have an aide. Of the 15 who are cutting up, 10 are ready to go on with the lesson. The other 5 need specialized help. You've got 40 minutes, mind you.
>
> So you deal with those 15 behavior problems. Already you're seeing the minutes dribble away and you're getting frantic, so you start to scrap the lesson you've laid out. The 10 who are ready to go on with the lesson are getting bored. The 5 who need help are lost. In the back of your mind you're saying, "I've got to cover X number of chapters."
>
> Now you've got what--20 minutes left. And you're thinking, "I'll try to reach that middle-of-the-road student." But then some smart aleck tries to mess with you and at the same time someone who needs your undivided attention walks into the room. Just when you realize you've got 30 books for 35 kids, ring, the 40 minutes are up, and a few minutes later a new class is walking in and the problems start all over. By the time you've gone through this 3 times in a day you are tired. So some poor kid who really wants to learn raises his hand and says, "Teacher." You spin around and yell at him, "What do you want?" (Lefkowitz 1980, p. 98).

As this story illustrates, there are constraints on teachers within a traditional classroom structure. Teachers find it difficult to address the affective and vocational aspects of development, in addition to the intellectual, when they work within this organizational framework. Thus, teachers will need to vary organizational arrangements in order to take on the expanded roles required by a more holistic approach to education.

Educators across the country have experimented with alternative organizational arrangements to better meet the needs of students, especially at-risk students. The experiments take many forms, and include the following:

- o Interdisciplinary team organization (including the collaboration of vocational and academic educators and the team approach to helping at-risk students)
- o Self-contained classrooms
- o Resource/tutorial models, consisting of the delivery of periodic educational and counseling services to students rather than regularly scheduled courses
- o Multiple period structure
- o Peer tutoring arrangements
- o Cohort maintenance, which entails keeping the same group of students together over a substantial period of time
- o Schools-within-a-school
- o Alternative schools (schools of choice)
- o Street academies and agency-based learning centers
- o Programs extending into the community, using settings outside of a school for experiential learning

These different modes of social organization modify the processing of students in terms of space, time, and social relations to increase the responsiveness and supportiveness of the school system. These alternative organizational arrangements give teachers an opportunity to work in another relationship with their students. In these settings, teachers can interact with students in fundamentally different ways to carry out instructional goals. These settings also give the teacher a chance to interact with each other and members of the broader community in new and closer ways. Teachers can begin to realize the power inherent in acting together. Alternative settings, then, provide a supportive environment responsive to the holistic needs of the student and increase feelings of collegiality among teachers (Florida Department of Education 1986).

Another important goal of reorganizing the school is to reduce class size in order to increase a student's interaction with teachers and other students. Small classes allow for more personal attention and individualized instruction. Studies indicate that children learn more in smaller classes (Glass, Cahen, Smith, and Filby 1982). Naturally, if class size is a factor in effective learning for all children, then it is a critical factor for those teetering on withdrawal from school.

A number of studies support the idea that small size is a critical variable in increasing retentive power. Hodgkinson (1985) correlated dropout rates with teacher salary, per pupil expenditure, and pupil-teacher ratio. He found that pupil-teacher ratio had the highest predictive level of the three factors. He also discovered that dropout rates for schools with the most favorable pupil-teacher ratio were less than two-thirds of those for schools with the worst ratios. A study by the University of Wisconsin (Wisconsin Vocational Studies Center 1980) corroborate Hodgkinson's results. The researchers did an enrollment comparison for 1978-79 and found that the 14 highest dropout rate high school districts had a significantly larger ($t = 2.17$, $p<.05$) enrollment (mean = 1,742) than the 15 lowest dropout rate school districts (mean = 276).

The size of the school per se probably is not as significant as the climate that can be created because of small school size. A Johns Hopkins study (Gottfredson 1985) explored the relationship between social disorganization in schools and school size. The study concluded that small schools of 300-400 students with a low student-adult ratio are viewed as having fewer disorders, higher achievement, higher student participation in extracurricular activities, and greater feelings of satisfaction with school life. Smaller schools are more manageable, less anonymous, and have more flexible schedules and smaller classes. These features of a school climate are associated with high retentive power.

The same observation holds for small classes--the climate made possible by smallness is actually more important than class size itself. Students tend to be absent from classes that they perceive as high in levels of competition and teacher control, and from classes that they perceive as low in teacher support (Moos and Moos 1978). Classrooms that are too large are organized (almost by necessity) more around control than meaningful dialogue, more around the authority of the teacher than the autonomy of students, and more around competition than collaboration. Students are far more likely to cut classes organized in this way than those organized to maximize participation (Fine and Rosenberg 1983).

It would appear, then, that classrooms that are more person-oriented as opposed to rules-oriented will be less likely to have students absent (Quay and Allen 1982). Successful dropout prevention programs create climates that are small settings with low teacher-student ratios, emphasize personalized attention to students needs, individualize instruction to personal learning styles, and offer consistent rewarding of student effort and reteaching (Illinois State Department of Education 1985). These programs are strongly peer- and teacher-oriented. They provide a more humanistic and flexible educational climate, where at-risk students can be helped with their immediate problems. These programs create small group systems where students feel they can be heard and supported. The climate is more highly interactive than traditional school climates.

One organizational innovation in particular has been successful in promoting interaction in the school: the interdisciplinary team organization. Reorganizing the school as a group of teams, not departments of various specialties, will increase interdisciplinary efforts, bolster responsiveness, and heighten cohesiveness among students and teachers. It is therefore fully consistent with the goals of an integrated learning environment. Interdisciplinary team organization is an effective organizational strategy for dropout prevention because it promotes the integration of the school environment.

Paul S. George (1982) has worked for over 10 years with schools in implementing an interdisciplinary team organization. He notes that three conditions must be fulfilled to truly have such an organization. First, teachers and students must be located together in the same area of the school. Second, teachers share similar schedules. Finally, there are at least two, usually more, subjects taught to the students on the team by the same combination of teachers.

A strong sense of community emerges from this organization. Students need smaller groups of teachers and students with which to identify than the traditionally organized high school permits. The team offers a turf on which to belong and a group to join. For teachers, the collaborative development of curriculum that ties together diverse disciplines can be exciting for everyone. The administrative tasks are made easier for the administrator when he or she shares decision making with teachers. Power sharing and group policy making are both the process and the product of the interdisciplinary team organization (ITO).

Lassiter Middle School in Jefferson County, Kentucky, is a school that has successfully implemented the group decision-making process distinctive of an ITO. Here, a team leader holds daily meetings to plan its work schedule and to decide whether to accept or modify proposals from school administration. The team as a whole brainstorms more effective ways to handle discipline problems. They set curriculum objectives (across their disciplines); and they prioritize in making budget allocations. Classroom arrangements are made where eight teachers oversee 150 students in separate rooms but each serving as a minischool within the school. Class length is flexible so that the teachers as a team can structure the school day to students' needs. Thus, if a project, experiment or discussion requires a longer period of time than the usual 40 minutes, teachers plan to allot more time for that activity. This flexibility both enhances educational experiences for students and empowers teachers by giving them the freedom to structure their students' days (*Business Week* 7 September 1987).

The irony is that teachers will have more power if they become willing to give up control. Teachers must sacrifice their turf to reap the benefits of collaboration. For example, educational practice has traditionally set up an opposition between vocational and academic education. Recently, though, vocational and academic teachers have been engaging in collaborative efforts to integrate academic instruction into the vocational curriculum. The National Center for Research in Vocational Education has developed materials to help educators incorporate a cooperative vocational and academic approach for improving students' skills in reading, writing, speaking, and mathematics (Crowe, Pritz, Sechler, and Veach 1987).

Dallas Public Schools has taken steps to integrate their vocational and academic programs into "vocademic" programs. One model employs a wagonwheel structure. Different buildings, the "spokes" of the school, are schools within a school that have specialized vocational clusters. The students go to the hub of the wagonwheel to receive academic instruction. This structure facilitates the interaction of vocational and academic instructors. This interaction makes possible development of more integrated curricula. When students are exposed to this curricula, they are better able to pull together diverse experiences and domains of knowledge.

Some structures also facilitate the interaction of teachers and students in creating the curriculum. Actively involving students in the design of programs will increase their level of commitment and the perceived relevance of the programs. Educators have increased student involvement in curriculum design and implementation in

a number of ways. Some have employed peer tutoring arrangements where students teach students and teachers provide only guidance and direction to their efforts. Some teachers ask for student input on instructional goals and selection of curricular materials.

Student-teacher interaction can also be increased by organizing education so that students keep the same teachers through a number of grades, by having self-contained classrooms, and by having students spend multiple periods with the same teacher. Educators will need to be creative in finding ways to promote the bonds between teachers and students.

Some educators, recognizing the alienating effects of large schools, have suggested that school districts move more toward alternative schools, schools within schools, and small schools. There is a growing awareness that many students do not benefit from the typical set of 40-50 minute periods with six different teachers. In response, some large urban high schools have broken down their comprehensive high schools into smaller, self-contained work groups within the school. The objective of a school-within- a-school pattern of organization is the successful transition from the self-contained, single teacher classroom of the elementary school to the larger school environment of secondary schools.

Just as individual schools have broken themselves down into alternative schools-within-schools, districts have made themselves, more and more, a series of alternative schools. Such "schools of choice" have a number of advantages over traditional comprehensive high schools. Raywid, a noted researcher on alternative education, has observed these advantages (*Education Week* 24 June 1987):

- o Differentiation: Alternative schools maximize student motivation by offering a particular curricular emphasis, instructional method, or school climate.

- o Cohesiveness: Alternative schools have a sense of shared purpose, which has been shown to have a positive impact on learning.

- o Autonomy: Principals and teachers in alternative schools enjoy more freedom from central control than their peers in traditional schools.

- o Size: Most alternative schools are smaller than traditional schools, which has helped build a sense of collegiality among students and staff.

These advantages add up to an environment that encourages collaboration within the school.

Other organizational arrangements also encourage collaboration with those outside the school. Des Moines Schools' "New Horizons" program assigns economically and academically disadvantaged students to rehabilitate dilapidated inner-city homes. The students spend half of each school day at the site, and attend class the rest of the day. Being engaged in the real-life project of neighborhood improvement builds the self-esteem of students. The New Horizons program also offers services in home repair, a summer work corps, private-sector work exchanges, and in-home supportive counseling. These support services and the feelings of accomplishment deriving from home rehabilitation encourage students to achieve in all aspect of life--including academics (*Industrial Education* September 1987).

These, and other, alternative modes of social organization result in different and new (and, hopefully, better) interactions among teachers, students, administrators, and members of the community. Needless to say, teachers who work in these alternative organizational arrangements find their roles expanded and their profession empowered in helping at-risk students and enriching the educational experiences of all students.

CHAPTER 11

CREATING A CAREER-FOCUSED CURRICULUM

Frequent meaningful interactions occur among many individuals, both in school and out of school, in the integrated learning environment. The meaningfulness of the interactions is determined by both the process and content of those interactions. The content of the interactions can be made meaningful, or relevant, to students if it is related to one or more of the three aspects of their development: vocational, academic, and psychosocial. During their high school careers, students become especially concerned about their vocational plans. More and more, they begin to plan for independence. Thus, a curriculum that is career-focused is a highly relevant curriculum for them.

Many individuals can be involved in creating and delivering a career-focused curriculum to high school students. Career development can be consciously facilitated by teachers and parents; work experience can be provided and guided by individuals from business; and community service opportunities can be created by members of the community. Relaying a career-focused content in all its dimensions will, therefore, require expanding the scope of persons involved in a student's education.

A number of strategies can be used to shift from a subject-centered curriculum to a career-focused curriculum. In general, the shift entails--

- o a conscious and planned facilitation of the school-to-work transition and
- o provision of a rich set of experiential and cooperative learning opportunities that socialize students to the workplace.

Facilitating the school-to-work transition requires career exploration, education, and development through vocational counseling. Part of the curricular content may include resume writing, interviewing skills, and even in-school job placement services. School-business linkages and linkages to community-based organizations may provide sources of experiential learning opportunities for students. Cooperative learning opportunities include school-work experiences and activities in youth organizations. A career-focused curriculum makes explicit efforts to provide career education, work experiences, and opportunities for community service.

Some alternative schools that are designed to be especially attractive to at-risk students employ a career-focused curriculum. Lotto (1982) has this comment:

> Some dropout and delinquency programs have shown that self-designed and self-paced curricula that integrate vocational and academic subjects with work experience are promising because they enable the disaffected student to acquire salable skills and to perceive that his or her schooling is relevant to the workplace. (p. 158)

Effective dropout prevention efforts, then, achieve a career-focused curriculum by encouraging students to apply academic learning to real-life situations and, similarly, relate vocational education experiences to core academic subjects.

Schools can increase their holding power by incorporating a career focus into their curriculum. The Career Center Model used in California is an exemplary

implementation of such a focus. The career center offers or coordinates basic career orientation and exploration courses that cover such areas as work habits, work attitudes, and career decision-making skills. Career center programs often offer occupational training and work experience. Career development becomes a central focus of the curriculum in this model.

Other schools have created a career-focused curriculum by blurring the lines between vocational and academic education. Pilot programs in Jefferson County (Kentucky) integrate academic and vocational studies in two schools. Students take their academic subjects at their home high school and explore vocational programs at the vocational center two periods each day. The project has brought together vocational and academic education, made academic instruction more practical for students who choose vocational education, correlated academic instruction with applied vocational skills, and gave students an opportunity to begin vocational training in the ninth grade. The competency-based curriculum is correlated with the present levels of academic skills while incorporating the vocabulary of areas of vocational education in its materials. The academic curriculum has been designed and presented in such a way that it can be related to vocational education and career choices. Students of the Academic/Vocational project have a broad understanding of the many vocational education opportunities available to them and, so, can make better decision about their future. Students participating in this project have shown a lower dropout rate than the general school population (Academic/Vocational Project: Final Progress Report, Jefferson County Board of Education 1983).

Students can also learn how to integrate their academic learning into their everyday life and work by learning experientially at work sites or in community service. When students enter work environments for the purposes of developing knowledge and skills, for promoting career development through observing or performing tasks associated with work, or for improving decision-making by studying the social context of work, they are learning experientially. The City as School (CAS) of New York City is an alternative high school that is based on an experiential curriculum. This high school links students with learning experiences throughout the community. Many types of organizations serve as sites for experiential learning--business, social, civic, cultural, or political. Students move from learning experience to learning experience and receive academic credit for each learning experience successfully completed. Teachers are either Resource Coordinators or Teacher Advisors. Teacher Advisors hold weekly orientations and class meetings. They are also responsible for individual meetings with students and their parents and for writing college evaluations. Resource Coordinators are responsible for developing new community site placements, creating curriculum for each site, monitoring student progress, and responding to students' problems. They make regular visits to learning sites. By linking to learning resources within the community, students can come to join the world of experience with the world of learning and actually live through their connectedness (Fisher 1982).

CAS, the Academic/Vocational project, and the Career Center are only three possible models for implementing a career-focused curriculum on a schoolwide basis. Educators have shown much creativity in linking together career development, work experience, and community service with academic learning.

Career Education

Every student should have a sense of career direction before graduation. This can be realized by helping students through all stages of career development, from kindergarten to 12th grade. In grades K-6, career orientation is achieved through activities that encourage the development of work attitudes and basic work and employment concepts. In grades 7-8, broad exploration of careers is made through coursework, guidance activities, and observation. In this stage, students begin to acquire specific job information. In grades 9-10, the prior stage is intensified through in-depth exploration. Students begin to acquire basic job skills and make tentative career plans through exploratory work experience, skill development courses, and other exposures to the world of work. Finally, in grades 11-12, career preparation is made. Work-related courses and laboratory experiences develop entry level employment competencies. Specific job skill training can be promoted through vocational education programs.

Educators have created curriculum materials that aim to promote career development. The National Center for Research in Vocational Education has developed a microcomputer instructional package called "Career Planning System" (CPS). CPS is a highly structured, closely integrated package designed to create a wide variety of career exploration and planning experiences for students who are in the process of developing a vocational plan. CPS actively involves students in planning their own career-related studies. CPS helps students achieve four major career development objectives, as follows:

- To discover personal interests
- To examine occupations to see how they relate to personal interests
- To identify areas of study in which personal interests may be developed and in which related skills may be acquired
- To relate educational preparation to potential occupational choices

An individualized educational plan for the student is the end result of CPS. The educational plan is shared with the teacher or counselor, who then works with the student to select basic vocational and academic courses that will help the student realize his or her occupational goals.

In addition to linking school program planning to career planning, some educators have also attempted to infuse career information into all courses. A comprehensive and systematic approach to career education for high school students has been developed by the Humboldt County (California) Office of Education. The materials and activities of this program, called "The Total Career Assessment Program," are infused into the academic curriculum in order to both reinforce basic skills and teach key career education concepts. The Total Career Assessment Program provides secondary students with self assessment, decision-making strategies, job search skills, career option exploration, and an individual career plan. The program is implemented through a team approach that includes parents, teachers, counselors, administrators, and community members. The team approach ensures that key concepts are carried through all aspects of the student's life and infused into all subject areas (Association of California Urban School Districts 1985).

These activities in career education are intended to ease the transition from school to work. To be effective, the activities should not only seek to impart career information, but should also help in the development of job search skills and skills in resume writing and interviewing. The National Center for Research in Vocational Education has synthesized research to develop a package of materials to help students formulate ideas about what work they want to do; how to match their aptitudes, abilities, and interests to job requirements; and how to conduct a job search. The package, *CONNECTIONS: School and Work Transitions*, contains modules that increase students' awareness of what characteristics employers want in their employees. It also includes a workbook that offers a systematic process for developing "career passports," or experience-based resumes. Job maintenance skills are also addressed (Bhaerman, Lankard, Gordon, and Dean 1987). The topics and skills are of obvious relevance to the lives of students and, therefore, have a place in dropout prevention.

Work Experience

Work experience can be an effective tool in dropout prevention if it is related to classroom skills and content. The provision of work experience in itself (i.e., work experience not systematically linked to school experience) may only draw the student further away from school. However, work experience approaches can be effective in dropout prevention when--

- o the work experiences are tied to the instructional objectives of the classroom;
- o the work experiences have operational linkages to the students' overall school plans and career goals;
- o the content of classroom activities is related to the work experience;
- o the work experiences are challenging and meaningful to the student, so that they are truly educational experiences; and
- o the teacher discusses the meaning of the work experiences with students, helping students to articulate the knowledge that they have acquired from the experiences.

If these conditions are met, then the overarching goal of the work experience approach has been met: to make clear the link between the world of work and classroom learning.

A frequently used (and all too often abused) model of a work experience approach is the work-study program. To ensure the effectiveness of work-study programs, careful student-by-student evaluations should be made of work-study activities, particularly those available to students in their high school careers. The purpose of the evaluations should be to monitor whether the activities meet specified objectives, encompass programmatic experiences, and involve clear linkages with the student's overall school program. Work-study programs should institute communication linkages between employers and school personnel and set down specific evaluation standards (Weber 1986).

The Peninsula Academies Program of the Sequoia Union (California) School District has such linkages and evaluation standards. The program is the outcome of a

collaborative effort between two high schools and over 35 high technology companies to help disadvantaged youth who are low achievers and have insufficient skills. This business-school partnership hopes to meet the vocational training and basic academic needs of educationally disadvantaged students. The program prepares these students for employment in the electronics and computer industry. It gives students both academic competence and skills for employment.

The program provides intensive instruction in English, mathematics, and science and extensive, hands-on experience in either electronics or computer technology through lab settings. Career planning (including job search guidance) and frequent contacts with business through quest speakers, field trips, and individual mentors are an integral part of the curriculum. Summer job opportunities are made available to students who have fulfilled 11th-grade requirements, and 12th graders are given part-time work experience positions during their last summer before graduation.

Employers have been pleased with the standards agreed upon and met through the program. Ninety-five percent of the 1985 Academies seniors were placed in work experience positions. Positions offered included production assembler, assistant electronics technician, computer operations trainee, data entry clerk, assistant lab analyst, and telecommunications operator. On a five-point scale, the employers rated the students' overall work performance, on the average, 3.7. A follow-up survey of the Academies' graduates showed that 94 percent were either working or going to a postsecondary school, compared to 64 percent of the comparison group. Furthermore, the employed graduates were earning an average of over $60 per week more than the employed comparison youths. The Peninsula Academies Program is demonstrating that a holistic approach that integrates basic academic skills with technical and vocational education is effective in relieving the disaffection with the present educational system for many students. The program also demonstrates the important role that businesses can play in enriching the curriculum by directly relating the world of school to work-a-day life (California State Department of Education 1986).

Community Service

Schools can also enrich the curriculum by using community resources. Dewey, the Carnegie Council, and Ernest Boyer have all spoken eloquently of the need to expose youth to opportunities to make valuable contributions to their communities. Dewey (Archambault 1964) has written:

> A society is a number of people held together because they are working along common lines, in a common spirit, and with reference to common aims...The radical reason that the present school cannot organize itself as a natural social unit is because just this element of common and productive activity is absent. (p. 300)

Secondary schools, indeed society in general, have failed to imbue students with a sense of purpose and fruitful connections by cutting them off from real-life activities that are important to the adult community. A report from the United States Office of Education (National Panel on High Schools and Adolescent Education 1974) described schools as--

> 'aging vats' that have isolated adolescents and delayed their learning adult roles, work habits, and skills. (p. 6)

Boyer has suggested that educators enlarge the purposes of secondary education by requiring that students serve their communities. Boyer (1983) bemoans the fact that

> today it is possible for American teenagers to finish high school yet never be asked to participate responsibly in life in or out of the school, never be encouraged to spend time with older people who may be lonely, to help a child who has not learned to read, to clean up the litter on the street, or even do something meaningful at the school itself. (p. 209)

A community service program would break the isolation of the adolescent; bring young people into touch with the elderly, sick, the poor, and the homeless; and acquaint them with neighborhood and governmental issues.

Boyer cites the efforts of Detroit Public Schools to involve students in improving the quality of community life. Students in the city schools must complete two hundred hours of out-of-school experiences during their high school career in order to graduate. Students may either work for pay or do volunteer work. Many students devote the time to volunteer service. They may work at hospitals, museums, convalescent homes, and churches. They may tutor children or help disabled people.

Other schools have developed an experiential curriculum that provides high school-based services to the community. Such services may include horticulture or landscaping, a bakery, print shop, community repairs, neighborhood renovation or beautification. In effect, implementation of this curriculum makes the school a service center for the community. Project-oriented community service rendered through a team of students, guided by responsible members of the community and teachers, has the further benefit of inculcating group process skills in students.

Project LEAD (Leadership Experience and Development) of Quest enables students, working closely with adult mentors, to make meaningful contributions to their communities and, in so doing, develop group process skills. Each Project LEAD team consists of six people: an adult team leader (usually a volunteer from a community service organization), a counselor or teacher, and four students. A formal training program helps each team to conduct a needs assessment in its community, develop broad support for its goals, recruit other students, and implement its service project in the school or community. Working on service projects increases students' sense of positive connection to their schools and communities. This can be a strong antidote to feelings of alienation and purposelessness. Service projects carried out under the program have involved students in cleaning up their communities, caring for younger children, and establishing a crime prevention program. By implementing a community project, students learn how to share ideas and work to reach a common goal (Gerler 1986).

Learning how to cooperate (and cooperating to learn) can be found in other programs also. Vocational education programs in particular often develop student organizations and cooperative work settings that heighten a student's sense of belongingness and feelings of mastery. Membership in small, cohesive groups reduces alienation and improves the likelihood of student retention in dropout prevention programs. So, similar effects can be expected for vocational education programs that require interdependence of student efforts.

Programs that promote group process skills can also take the form of political or social action or career internship. The experiential component of these programs places students in new, empowering roles and promotes personal involvement. They create opportunities for students to practice initiative and thereby promote their

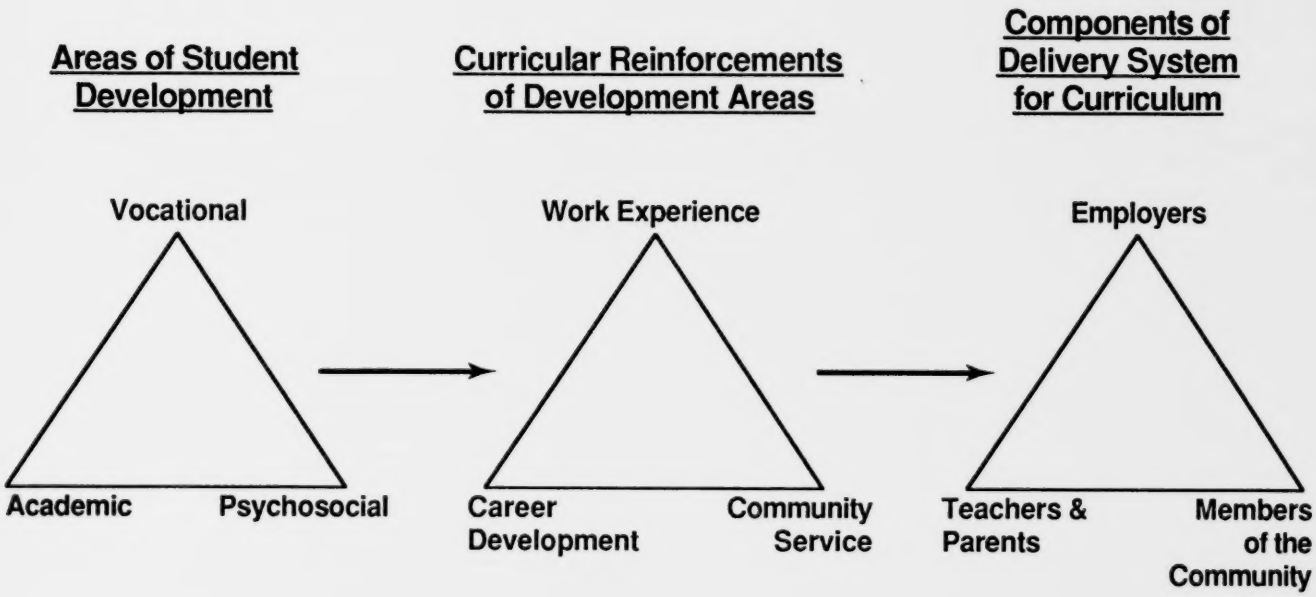


Figure 5. Realization of the integrated curriculum

self-image. Programs requiring cooperation that are implemented in the classroom engage students in helping each other learn and changes classrooms from sources of disruption or apathy into resources for learning and reinforcement of success. Cooperative learning is superior to competitive learning for all students; this is especially true, though, for at-risk students (Johnson and Johnson 1985).

Conclusion

A national nonprofit corporation, 70001, prepares economically disadvantaged youth (mostly school dropouts) for competitive employment. This corporation has developed a four component model to serve these youths that incorporates all of the curricular strategies mentioned above--career education, work experience, and community service.

The four components of their model, which has inspired 58 local programs in 16 states, include preemployment training, educational upgrading, motivational activities, and job placement assistance. Preemployment training entails conducting mock interviews for participants and lasts for four weeks. The educational upgrading component consists of helping participants earn their GEDs by tutoring them in math, reading, and English. The motivational component includes a variety of community service projects and workshops on career and personal development. These workshops concentrate on such life skills as apartment hunting, checkbook balancing, and effective communications. The job placement component is the culmination of the participant's enrollment in 70001. Job developers at 70001 work with private employers in the local area to place clients into unsubsidized jobs. The four components used by 70001 will be adapted to dropout prevention programs in the near future (Sizemore 1985).

Implementation of such curricular changes in the school will help educators realize an integrated curriculum in schools. As figure 5 illustrates, an integrated curriculum addresses all areas of student development--vocational, academic, and psychosocial. These developmental areas can be reinforced in the curriculum, respectively, through the curricular strategies of work experience, career development, and community service. Persons involved in delivering the integrated curriculum should include employers, teachers and parents, and members of the community. An integrated curriculum has more relevance for students than the traditional curriculum. Therefore, a school that integrates its curriculum will increase its holding power.

CHAPTER 12

PROVIDING FOR SUCCESS

Some students who drop out are successful. Looking at how good outcomes result, even in the face of having dropped out, may provide insights into effective interventions. Bernard Lefkowitz has related some success stories (Lefkowitz 1980). The story of Nancy Gagon highlights the importance of an expectation of success and the effectiveness of a supportive work setting in learning:

> Nancy Gagon, who came to the United States from the Dominican Republic when she was 10 years old, spent most of her time in English classes reading Spanish comic books. A slow-talking, overweight young woman, she read at a sixth-grade level when she dropped out of high school. "Why should I study?" she asked. "I knew from the first day I was going to fail." While she was being trained to work in a fast-food restaurant, two other trainees patiently taught her to read the training manual, the menu, and the health and sanitary regulations. Later, when she was assigned to a restaurant, she got more help from the employers there. (p. 110)

Success was achieved for Nancy Gagon by providing her with a motivational context to acquire basic skills through peer tutoring and applied learning.

Once again, Michael Armistead's story demonstrates an instance where learning occurred in a supportive workplace:

> After working for a year as a stock clerk in a stationery store in Cleveland, Michael Armistead now manages the store one day and two nights a week. He had failed courses before he dropped out. "The boss said he'd give me a chance if he knows I could add and subtract," he says. "So I taught myself. I had to." Success. (p. 110)

Michael Armistead and others like him can be successful in the proper school setting. The proper setting can be characterized as an applied learning context. Often students at risk of dropping out prefer to learn in this context.

Schools may need to make major structural changes to offer such a context. A possible scenario for such structural changes is offered by the Denver Public School System. Denver schools plan to replace the Carnegie unit with competency-based performance standards. Students can move ahead with a subject if they can pass that particular competency examination. The schools will also teach basic skills with the aid of computer-assisted instruction (which has the benefit of being self-paced and individualized). The use of computers will allow teachers time to give students individual attention and reteach. Students can spend more time on tasks tailored to their level of mastery.

Competency-based instruction is an educational technology that supports a more general trend in education toward more individualized modes of instruction. The impetus for this movement comes from an awareness that students have different learning styles. The traditional, passive lecture format employing linguistic modes of expression and covering abstract concepts is not suited to all learners. This is especially true of at-risk students, who often prefer learning in cooperative settings

where they carry out tasks with real-life practical outcomes. In any case, the use of diverse instructional strategies will enrich the education of all students.

Applied Learning Context

Vocational educators are growing in their awareness of the need to improve basic skills training in their classrooms. Traditionally, in the minds of many educators and the general public, vocational education has been set in opposition to academic education. New concerns about the level of mastery of basic skills among high school students has caused reformers to push for higher academic requirements for graduation. Some states have reported a decrease in vocational enrollments, and attribute this decrease to the increased requirements. Thus, reformers seem to be acting on an assumption that academic and vocational education has opposing instructional goals. However, Hamilton (1986) suggests that another direction to school reform might be to "view vocational education as a vehicle for teaching academic knowledge and skills. The goal then would not be teaching specific employment skills but giving practical, concrete application to academic instruction on the one hand and teaching generalizable employee virtues such as punctuality, orderliness, and precision on the other" (p. 424).

Some visionary educators have suggested that a second wave of educational reform will include at-risk students, who are swelling in the school population. On the agenda for this second school reform is the integration of academic and vocational education. The National Center for Research in Vocational Education has explored ways to fulfill this part of the agenda by developing *BASICS: Bridging Vocational and Academic Skills*, a basic skills resource package to encourage the collaboration of vocational and academic educators (Crowe, Pritz, Sechler, and Veach 1987).

One way to blend vocational and academic instruction is to develop materials for applied learning in a problem-solving mode. In the BASICS package, this path has been explored. The following excerpt (with some minor editing) is from a piece of the BASICS package, entitled *Instructional Materials Development* (Crowe et al. 1987).

> The rationale for designing instructional materials in a problem-solving mode is grounded in two basic ideas (1) that employers need workers who are able to solve problems on the job, and (2) that students learn more effectively if material is presented in a context that they see as relevant. Instructional materials that focus on problem solving as a means of applying academic concepts have the advantage of developing not only basic academic skills (i.e., the three R's) but also the higher order thinking skills of problem solving and decision making. Furthermore, the presentation of academic material in an applied work context, which almost invariably means a decision-making or problem-solving context as well, can help motivate all students to learn.
>
> The case is even stronger for those students who have trouble mastering abstract academic concepts. For those students, the application of the concepts to realistic, concrete problems and tasks may be critical to their learning the concepts at all.
>
> In discussing the benefits of enhancing the applied nature or work-relatedness of instructional materials, it should be noted that this is precisely the area in which a joint effort of vocational and academic teachers can be most effective. One of the following statements is by a vocational educator, the other

by an academic educator--in the final analysis, it would be best to say that they are both educators.

Which stave in a barrel is most important? They all are. One of the concerns in the Unfinished Agenda was strengthening the ties between academic and vocational courses so that the academic learning could be applied in problem-solving situations and have greater utility in the workplace and life in general. These skills are interdependent, but this fact is too often overlooked. (Dr. Robert E. Taylor quoted in *Education and Employment: Where We Are and Where We Ought to Go* 1985, p. 33).

One of the recommendations of the high school study commission was to strengthen the relationship between the academic and vocational offerings of schools and to view vocational programs as a way of strengthening the application of basic skills and problem solving. I think one of the ways that you develop problem-solving ability is, in fact, to solve problems. The applied learning of vocational classes is rich in problem-solving opportunities and reinforces problem-solving skills. (Dr. Harry F. Silberman quoted in *Education and Employment: Where We Are and Where We Ought To Go*, p. 33).

For instructional materials to function in the desired way to apply learning in a problem-solving mode, the developer needs to be conscious of certain characteristics that should be built in as development proceeds. These characteristics include the following:

- Problem-solving and decision-making processes and competencies are embedded in the activities.
- Activities are participatory in nature and related to the real world and real consequences.
- Reinforcement of basic skills information needed in the situation is provided along with a suitable degree of guidance on how to proceed.

Complex thinking processes include problem solving and decision making. Although similar, the two processes differ somewhat. Problem solving uses thinking skills to resolve a known or defined difficulty. It involves several steps:

- Identifying and defining the problem
- Collecting data concerning the problem, separating fact from opinion
- Forming hypotheses, through logical reasoning
- Testing the hypotheses
- Forming a conclusion
- Applying the conclusion
- Evaluating the conclusion

These steps are the same as the scientific method.

Decision making involves the thinking skills needed to choose the best response from several options. It entails the comparison of advantages and disadvantages of alternate approaches. It involves several steps:

- o Defining the problem
- o Collecting data
- o Identifying obstacles to the goal
- o Identifying alternatives, ranking alternatives, weighing risks and benefits
- o Choosing the best alternative
- o Evaluating the decision

Bloom's taxonomy of six thinking levels include knowledge, comprehension, application, analysis, synthesis, and evaluation. Progression through these levels requires increasingly complex thinking skills in almost endless combinations. Persons who can apply a variety of thinking skills generally make better decisions and solve problems more effectively. Those who have skills that allow them to visualize the consequences of their decisions usually can make better decisions (Worsham and Stockton 1986).

It was pointed out earlier that one of the ways to develop problem-solving ability is to solve problems. This implies that the students should assume responsibility for solving the problem in a given situation and should consider the consequences of their decisions.

One of the most effective ways to ensure these characteristics is to use simulation techniques in the materials. A vocational simulation simplifies elements of a real world work situation and presents them in a form suitable for the classroom. Students take on the roles of people in the work situations. They are given conditions that are as realistic as possible and are asked to develop realistic solutions. The possible outcomes of their actions should be specified so that a tie to the consequences cements the relevance of the academics learned and used. Simulations can be designed for group interaction or for individual work.

The materials can be organized around either academic concepts (and how they are applied vocationally) or vocational tasks (and the academic skills necessary to perform them). In either case it is important to be explicit about the academic subject matter to be used. Some targeted review of basic skills information can be implanted if necessary.

Depending on the situation and the problem-solving skills of the students, it may be helpful to provide some guidance on how to solve the problem. One option is to provide some analysis of the problem. A second option is to list the steps that need to be taken to solve the problem.

Some directions should be given, at a minimum to indicate the nature of the desired outcome. The directions can be made more detailed and more specific as the need dictates.

Competency-based Education

Competency-based education (CBE), as well as applied learning, enhances the relevance of education, but in a different way. While material developed in an applied learning mode possesses much work-relatedness, competency-based education uses a systematic and flexible instructional approach that leads a student, at his or her own pace, from present competency levels to higher levels, step-by-step. This instructional approach spells out performance requirements in the form of objectives and provides directions which help move the student toward **competency** or successfully demonstrated performance of job tasks.

Pritz and Crowe have also written about CBE in the *Instructional Materials Development* piece in the BASIC package, mentioned previously. The following is an excerpt from that piece.

In education, learning has often been accepted as the variable and time the constant. Whenever it is said that a course involves a specific number of hours of instruction, acceptance of this historical approach to education is demonstrated. A set number of hours per course is partly an administrative and planning convenience. However, under these circumstances, teaching is often geared to covering as much information as possible in the time permitted, in hopes that enough will be learned to allow students to be successful.

Many persons feel that teachers should be opting to implement programs in which learning is the constant and time the variable. Educators, both vocational and academic, in many states are currently working to make this option a reality in their school programs through the implementation of competency-based education (CBE).

A central idea is that a course of study satisfy each student's particular personal, vocational, and academic needs. The strategies or techniques that best fit individual learning characteristics and styles should be a primary concern. However, teachers often find this difficult to put into practice. Suppose that the instructor knows exactly what ought to be taught to prepare each student in an occupation. How does the instructor teach each student in a way he/she will learn best? A student who has good visual learning ability (learning through pictorial or visual instruction) may not be successful when given a large amount of printed material or verbal instruction. That student may benefit from a variety of well-chosen filmstrips or slides to enhance his/her learning strengths. Similarly, a student who learns better from having a skill or concept demonstrated will require more demonstration for successful training. Some students will learn more effectively if they can have time to read and review written learning material. Furthermore, some students may need cooperative tutoring arrangements to enhance their learning. The teacher must be prepared to offer a variety of learning alternatives in a self-paced system.

Competency-based education (CBE) is one answer to these needs. CBE is a flexible, systematic approach in which students work at their own pace in an individualized program. Using a sequence of performance objectives and learning

experiences or activities, students work toward successful performance of occupational and learning tasks which signify a level of competency in those tasks. Their performance is evaluated on the basis of criteria stated in the performance objectives.

A characteristic feature of competency-based education is the use of modules. A module is a type of learning package that usually includes a terminal performance objective, enabling objectives, essential cognitive information, and criterion-referenced evaluation. While modules are developed in a wide variety of formats, most are self-contained, transportable, and designed for individual use. Performance objectives may be, and are, used in many types of instructional materials.

A performance objective is the instructional description of a task. It describes briefly what students are to be able to do when they have completed the module and are ready to demonstrate the particular task. For a chef in training, the performance objective of a task might be:

> Given a simulated situation, prepare three menus each for luncheons and dinners. Your completed menus must meet the criteria on the performance checklist.

A formal definition of a performance objective is as follows:

> Performance Objective--A statement describing desired student performance, the conditions under which the performance is to occur, and the criteria by which the performance will be evaluated. The student is expected to be able to do something, rather than to simply know something. Thus, while knowledge is required in order to perform correctly, emphasis is placed on observable behavior. Performance objectives clarify the learning outcomes expected of the student and reflect the learning goals expressed in terms of the desired results of instruction.

Performance objectives are developed directly from a task analysis. A performance objective may be written for an entire task or for each operation. A good "rule of thumb" is that the more complex the task and related skills, the more performance objectives and modules will be required.

A performance objective consists of three parts: conditions, performance, and criteria which are usually in this order. In developing performance objectives, it is helpful to formulate the performance part first and thus focus on it as primary.

The performance part of the objective describes the specific learning outcome as the terminal behavior to be demonstrated by the student when he or she has achieved the objective. Only one behavior should be included in a performance objective. The feeling that more than one verb is necessary is often an indication that a task should be broken down further.

The performance must describe student behavior rather than teacher behavior and should specify knowledge, skills, or attitudes. A behavior should not specify what an individual is doing to or for another individual. An example of behavior stated in an undesirable way is:

In a communications course, the teacher will help the student to complete job applications.

In each performance objective, "the student will be able to . . ." can be used as a stem to focus the objective on student behavior.

The performance may be categorized into three major types:

- **Psychomotor:** emphasis is on physical skills and dexterity.
- **Cognitive:** emphasis is on knowing, conceptualizing, comprehending, applying, synthesizing, and evaluating.
- **Affective:** emphasis is on attitudes, values, and emotions.

For competency-based education, psychomotor and cognitive objectives are the aim, and the particular language used in stating the objective is critical. (This doesn't mean that the affective area is not important, simply that it can often be embodied in the materials in other ways.) Most authors pay special attention to the verb in the statement of an objective. Such nonobservable verbs as "think," "appreciate," and "know" are considered unacceptable. However, specific, observable action verbs such as "write," "assemble," and "state" are highly acceptable.

The conditions part of the objective identifies the limits and circumstances under which the student will perform the behavior. This includes specifying the tools, job aids, and references that the students will use as well as the setting in which they will perform. These should be identical to the test situation. The purpose here is to clarify the objective; therefore, some consider this part optional if no clarification is required.

Finally, criteria set minimum standards that the student must meet to be certified by the teacher as having attained competency. If these standards appear on the task analysis, it is a matter of incorporating those in the performance objectives. The instructor certifies the competency by signing the performance or evaluation checklist.

This type of evaluation has several functions for the student:

- It provides advance knowledge (in a highly specific breakdown) of what the student will be asked to do.
- It provides a pretest as well as a posttest. It provides the opportunity for students to "test out" of modules covering skills they already have and spend their time instead on skills they need to learn. If this option is not available, the use of the evaluation as a pretest still points out the areas in which the most work is necessary.
- It provides a self-check of progress in skill development before the student asks to be evaluated.
- It identifies skills that have not been attained and for which additional time/remediation may be necessary.

- It forms an organized, comprehensive, and highly specific competency record for the student to share with potential employers as evidence of certified skills.

Thus, for the student, competency-based education means providing young people with an opportunity to learn what they need to know, not what they already know. This instructional system renders in a systematic way accurate assessments and learning plans that start at the current level of the student and allows the student to finish when their goals are accomplished for that component part of the program (the module). Students move at their own pace, not in relationship to others in the class (Strumpf 1987).

Competency-based instruction is especially effective with at-risk youth in remediating their basic skills. The Comprehensive Competencies Program (CCP) available through the Remediation and Training Institute of Washington, D.C. has successfully employed competency-based, computer-assisted instruction to improve the basic skills of school dropouts. The effectiveness of this program has been attributed to the instructional system's maximization of time on task (crucial to basic skills mastery) and provision of prompt, accurate information on students' levels of performance (Strumpf 1987).

Individualization of Learning Styles

An applied learning method relates instruction to everyday problem-solving situations. Competency-based instruction tailors learning to students' own pace and level of competency. Both approaches increase the relevance of education to a student's own life circumstances and present abilities. The relevance of education can also be increased for students by being responsive to individual differences in learning styles. Students are better able to assimilate information and acquire skills if the modes of presentation and styles of direct instruction accommodate and nurture their own learning styles.

The BASICS' *Roadsigns from Research* presents the concern for individualization of learning styles. The following is an excerpt.

> Years ago, the high dropout rate was accepted, thereby minimizing the issue of differences. More recently, the desire to have schools prevent dropping out has resulted in alternative content and experiments with different methods and materials. Also, students have been grouped by perceived ability level for class enrollment.
>
> Ability grouping may unfortunately have impeded learning basic skills by limiting the extent to which lower groups are stimulated by peers in higher groups. Ability grouping may also have inadvertently misled teachers into using a smaller repertoire of teaching methods. Goodlad's recent national study of schools found an alarmingly narrow range of teaching methods in use nationwide at all school levels (Goodlad 1984).
>
> Where it is used, mastery learning appears to reverse this trend. Research by Bloom and others concludes that students differ in their rate of learning rather than in their basic capacity to learn or achieve (Bloom 1981). A teacher's initial reaction to this claim may be disbelief, but Bloom's studies are based on actual classroom events.

Bloom's studies reveal that--

- o under favorable conditions, up to 90 percent of the students can learn school subjects, presumably including basic skills, up to the same standard that the top 10 percent of the students accomplish under usual conditions;

- o perception of how well one is doing compared to peers influences self-esteem more than standardized achievement tests do;

- o under favorable conditions, most students become similar in learning ability, rate of learning, and motivation for further learning.

In other words, learning conditions create individual differences more than student capability. Additional time on task and teacher feedback are examples of favorable learning conditions. Another key example is that teachers provide a different method for students who do not achieve mastery through the initial approach.

In recent years several learning style models, reflecting the work of psychologists and educators, have appeared to help explain how students learn and what learning conditions they need in order to thrive. "Style" refers to the gradual development and dynamic nature of an individual's learning behavior. Learning styles are overall patterns of individual learning procedures and preferences, influenced by both heredity and environment. These patterns are fairly stable, but capable of adjustment, depending on the learning task and teaching method used. Also, as people mature, their learning styles tend to deal with abstractions better.

Existing learning style theories focus on one or more of three aspects:

- o **Cognitive**--how the brain receives, processes, stores, retrieves, and applies information

- o **Affective**--how emotional and personality characteristics such as motivation, interests, and sociability influence the learning situation

- o **Physiological**--how the senses, environment, food, and time of day enhance or impede the learning process

Frequently, learning style characteristics are depicted in polar opposites. For example, a cognitive pair is sequential vs. random. An affective pair is realistic vs. imaginative. A physiological may be a preference to quiet vs. noise. Some of these polar opposites may appear to suggest the complementary relationship between the left and right hemispheres of the brain.

How students perceive information is one aspect of learning style. Sensory preferences, environmental needs, and emotional factors such as risk-taking and motivation are other aspects. Field-dependence vs. field independence, first described by cognitive psychologist Herman A. Witkin, may hold one of the most important keys to improving learning. Trace the influence of these two perception characteristics, and the implications of learning styles for achieving basic skills become clearer.

Field-independent students perceive analytically. They are good at learning tasks that involve breaking a whole into its parts. Their orientation is impersonal; concepts are interesting for their own sake. It is easy for them to structure information.

Field-dependent students perceive globally. They are good at drawing relationships that connect parts into a single context. Their orientation is social; concepts of greatest interest relate to their own experience. If organization is not provided, they adhere to whatever structure that information happens to have.

With their analytical and organizational skills, field-independent students may find it easy to apply basic math skills in solving word problems. Field-dependent students, however, may not master subtraction until they experience personal relevancy through the social context, for example, of simulating a cashier making change.

Research shows that secondary school teachers favor learning tasks based on lectures. This tendency unfortunately favors the learning style of field-independent auditory students only. The limited number of teaching techniques used by school teachers generally may help to explain the problem many students have with basic skills.

Research suggests that the difficulty of the following groups to learn basic skills (i.e., achieve academically) may be partially attributable to unmet learning style needs:

- Adolescent delinquents (many of whom seem to have learning disorders)
- Dropouts
- Poor readers
- Certain ethnic groups
- Many youth of the majority population

Although questioned by some, research by Dunn and Dunn (1979) also indicates that responding to learning styles can directly increase academic achievement. More certainly, addressing learning styles especially improves attitudes and reduces discipline problems--two important affective issues in dealing with students who struggle to learn basic skills. Attitude and discipline can in turn affect academic achievement.

Just as students have learning styles, teachers do too. Most learning style theorists say that teachers tend to teach in harmony with the way they prefer to learn. Other factors, such as how teachers were themselves taught and how they perceive students' needs, may affect the flexibility of their teaching.

Many learning theorists advocate matching learning and teaching styles, at least initially.

Researchers, however, disagree about the effect of constantly matching teaching styles with learning styles. Certainly one needs to meet the student at

his or her level, but growth in learning ability may not occur without some positive discomfort strategically employed. Also, a student's preference may not reflect the way that person learns best if that preference disrupts performance. Lying down to read, for example, can lead to falling asleep.

In fact, it is impossible to match all aspects of style because of the variety in teacher, student, and task characteristics. The greatest merit perhaps in matching styles when teaching basic skills may be to improve students' attitude, decrease their anxiety, and to strengthen a particular cognitive skill such as abstract thinking.

More than one theorist has sought to distinguish the relationships between different learning and teaching styles. Gregorc (1982) does so by focusing on how people perceive information (concrete vs. abstract) and order information (sequential vs. random). He has used the same descriptors for four learning styles and four teaching styles:

- Concrete random (CR)--intuitive
- Concrete sequential (CS)--experimental
- Abstract random (AR)--reflective
- Abstract sequential (AS)--logical

Gregorc believes that students and teachers have strengths in at least one of these styles. Strength in more than one style makes for more flexibility in teaching and learning.

The objective for teachers, believes Gregorc, is to develop skill in several styles to better teach students whose learning style does not match the teacher's preferred style. Students should also be challenged with unpreferred teaching styles when their confidence and achievement through preferred styles are achieved.

Cornett (1983), in a Phi Delta Kappa booklet on learning and teaching styles, offers several teaching strategies that recognize the existence of different learning styles. Using them fosters a more flexible teaching style. These strategies (see Cornett's booklet for more detail and examples) may be useful in teaching basic skills to students with learning difficulties:

- Ask questions of all types and at all levels of the cognitive domain to address several levels of thinking.
- Help students engage new ideas through past experiences by providing a general overview of material to be learned.
- Clarify the purpose before involving students in any learning experience.
- Facilitate remembering and skill development through spaced practice that incorporates more than one sensory mode if possible.

- Help students process and retrieve information through multisensory techniques (e.g., both write and say directions).
- Bring closure to learning through a variety of review and reflection strategies.
- Make abstractions less difficult through the use of concrete examples.
- Give students choices that capitalize on their interests.
- Individualize the pace of learning.

By using these and other strategies, teachers can better match their teaching style to learning styles.

Peer Tutoring

The recurrent, overarching, and unifying theme of this guide on dropout prevention has been the necessity to increase the quality, scope, and frequency of interactions among all involved in the school system in order to enhance the integrity of the school environment and thereby decrease the dropout rate. The quality (or meaningfulness) of those interactions can be enhanced by making the school environment more task-oriented. Competency-based and computer-assisted instruction maximizes time on task, while an applied learning method consciously constructs learning situations where tasks done embed basic skills and higher-order thinking skills. Individualization to learning styles increases the meaningfulness of teacher-student interactions by translating instruction into the student's "language." Thus, these instructional strategies serve to increase the quality of interactions in the school environment.

There is a particular instructional strategy that serves to also increase the scope and frequency of interactions in the school environment. In traditional school environments, student-student interactions are largely limited to students' own cliques and the business of these interactions usually concerns out-of-school activities of little educational value. Peer tutoring is a technique that gives students structured opportunities to interact with students outside their own cliques in transacting the business of the school--learning.

A supportive environment emerges when school or program spirit is built through meaningful peer interactions. Peer networking and counseling helps in making a family atmosphere. The school may even want to experiment with instituting "family" units in targeting their troubled adolescents. Such new social units are composed of four or five peers and a concerned professional or trained volunteer. They encourage ventilation of frustration and sadness (not necessarily relating to school), establish guidelines for positive interaction, prepare the student for learning by resolving personal issues, and promote an "esprit de corps" among students. The "family" should be as stable as possible and follow the student through his or her school years. Successful operation of such units in the school will depend on selecting staff that provide good models, express caring and commitment, and are willing to go "beyond the call of duty."

Peer counseling can be regarded as simply being peer tutoring where the curriculum is life skills. Naturally, there are peer tutoring programs where the curriculum focuses on vocational and academic skills.

Some dropout prevention efforts use a peer tutoring approach to remediate basic skills. The Model School Adjustment Program of Broward County Schools uses trained peer tutors to help dropout-prone students with study techniques and basic skills. These tutors also present a positive peer example. Students in this program receive peer tutoring four times a week. Tutoring is given by the student tutors who receive credit for their help. During the first semester of the 1986-87 school year, 22 out of 23 students showed improvement in their GPA, attendance, and attitudes toward school. Other peer tutoring programs train potential dropouts to serve as tutors for other students. This approach has also produced significant achievement gains for both tutors and students (Hunt 1985).

Technique for Remedition (Crowe et al. 1987) is a guide for program planners to use in designing a peer tutoring program for basic skills remediation. The guide presents guidelines, suggestions, and examples for planning and developing a peer tutoring program. It presents this process in a systematic fashion.

The alternative instructional strategies presented in this chapter are not intended to be exhaustive, but they all highlight instructional modes that promote the integrity of the school environment.

CHAPTER 13

MONITORING PROGRESS

The broad-based approach to dropout prevention presented in this guide presupposes a general orientation to education. Rather than school being a place where only academic skills and knowledge are acquired, school should be a place where life goals are clarified, preliminary plans to achieve those goals are formulated, resources and services necessary to begin realizing those plans are coordinated (on both a school and community level), and a continual reevaluation of life goals occurs throughout the school career and the student's milieu is responsive to and supportive of those changes. Such a broad reorientation would put school as the locus where a number of lines of forces (peer, family, educational, community, economic, and psychological forces) intersect to help in the adolescent's project of individuation. School would become an arena where a link between life experience and schooling is consciously and dynamically forged.

Margaret Mead (1953) has speculated (in *Coming of Age in Samoa*) that adolescence is such a time of turbulence for youth in Western societies because the transition from roles assumed in childhood are so dramatically different from adult roles. Schooling that is centered on construction of a life design, a gestalt of the entire growing process, would ease the transition from childhood to adulthood and make adolescence an easier time.

In restructuring the schools, administrators should seek to make school **mean** something to everyone: a very difficult task given the diversity of the student population. At present, school really means something to a minority of students. To most, school is a social (if not legal) obligation to meet, it is a "grind" to tolerate by delaying gratification, or it is a requirement to guarantee a better job and a higher income. School should mean more.

Adolescent psychologists have observed that the period of adolescence is protracting. At the same time that children are being pressured to mature earlier and earlier, the time when they are assuming productive, adult roles is growing to be later and later. Researchers have also observed that dropouts want to assume adult roles prematurely. The conflict is clear: Dropouts want to be adults sooner and society wants them to remain children longer. One way to resolve this conflict is to set up opportunities for teenagers to take on productive roles in society.

The old reality with which secondary schools dealt were the difficulties in making the transition to adult roles in an industrial society. The new, postindustrial reality is that schools are presently oriented to middle-class, college-bound students, yet schools have more and more students who aren't from this background. Schools have responded in the past with traditional vocational education; a response needs to be made now that is just as creative and constructive. Diverse approaches can be used, but a broad-based approach that expands vocational education by integrating some of its elements into the academic curriculum seems to be the right direction.

The broad-based approach involves a reorientation to education. The orientation requires that the school forges an explicit link to life experiences in the student's family, community, and workplace. There are a number of school practices that can operationalize or institutionalize this reorientation. What school practices are actually chosen will vary according to local conditions. But the ultimate goal for all

schools is to focus on the students' clarification of life goals in a supportive context. So the process of schooling should consciously and in a direct fashion facilitate the resolution of identity issues.

This reorientation implies a reformulated educational philosophy. The philosophy advances a new model of the educated person. This new model states that the educated person is one who has learned how to clarify and realize values and how to fulfill unique meaning. The instruments through which such learning is both achieved and manifested reduces to three fundamental human activities: thinking (including analytical skills, decision making, interpretation of texts and situations, and problem solving), feeling (including self-awareness, feelings of belongingness, and sensitivity and assertiveness), and creating (including writing, scientific experimentation, basic mathematical modeling, and production of physical objects). These are the "basics" that would be acquired through creating a supportive work setting for students. Thinking skills would be embedded in tasks; affect would be involved in working with others to achieve goals and gaining a sense of mastery and competence in a real-life arena; and opportunities for creating would be demanded by an open learning environment whose social actors had high expectations of and support for each other.

Naturally, changes in curriculum and instruction demand changes in evaluation of student performance (and, implicitly, program effectiveness). Three questions may be asked in evaluating programs employing the restructured curriculum and instruction:

- Does the program enhance the employability of students? Are work attitudes and values inculcated?
- Are core competencies imparted that increase the students' adaptability to the workplace?
- Is personal development facilitated? In particular, is the developmental task of adolescence--the task of establishing self-identity--addressed by the program?

These criteria are broader than the usual criteria employed.

Traditional criteria vary according to program: if the student is in a vocational education program, effectiveness is determined by placement in the job for which he or she was trained; if the student is in a college-preparatory program, effectiveness is judged by entrance into college. But the criteria of employability, adaptability, and personal development apply to any student, in any program. So these criteria have the advantage of not closing off a particular future by selection of a "track" in high school. And these criteria are those that should be used in evaluating the restructured school.

Evaluation of the Restructured School

Schools need to help students become versatile enough to learn throughout a working lifetime. At the point of graduation, students should ideally be prepared for employment and postsecondary education. The purpose of school, then, is to provide a setting where students can develop the tools that they will need to make sense of their diverse experiences in a rapidly and continually changing workplace. As has been argued throughout this book, the school should be an integrated learning environment

where students gain the ability to integrate aspects of their environment into coherent wholes.

An integrated learning environment is created by intensifying the interactions of individuals involved in the school system. Three aspects of the interactions are manipulated:

- o The meaningfulness of interactions: increasing the relevance of education for students
- o The scope of interactions: having students interact with a broader group of people--out-of-school and in-school
- o The frequency of interactions: providing more opportunities for students to interact in meaningful, expanded ways with others.

To measure the integrity of the school environment, school administrators may want to consider constructing an instrument that measures "the index of integration."

The index of integration is a composite score of the observed levels of interaction occurring in the school environment and their intensity. School personnel who want to evaluate a school or sample of schools can observe what interactions occur, how often they occur, and how participatory the interactions are. The chart (see exhibit 1) identifies the interaction pairs, the average score of the interactions, and the product of the two that represents a weighted score of the interaction pair.

The scoring protocol is as follows (adapted from Likert 1961 quoted in Gaston 1987):

1. An exploitative-authoritative interaction characterizes a clearly superior-subordinate relationship. Communication is downward. Sanctions are applied to motivate subordinates. Interaction is limited, especially between hierarchial levels. Decision making is concentrated at the top. There is little supportive behavior and little mutual trust and confidence between leaders and subordinates.

2. A benevolent-authoritative interaction is similar to the exploitive-authoritative interaction but not to such an extreme. It can be characterized as paternalistic.

3. The consultative interaction is similar to the participative interaction but not to such an extreme.

4. A participative interaction is characterized by supportive leadership. There is substantial team work here. Decision-making is shared in setting and attaining goals. There is a high level of trust and confidence between leaders and subordinates. Communication flows freely both vertically and horizontally and is frequent. There is a concern for control of performance at all hierarchical levels of the organization.

After scoring the interactions observed in the school and recording their frequency, the composite score, the sum of all weighted scores over every interaction pair, can be computed. This score represents the integrity of the school environment.

To assess effectiveness, the evaluator should determine the composite score before any strategies are implemented (to calculate the baseline performance of the school) and determine the score after implementing dropout prevention strategies (such as those described in this book). There should not only be a significant rise in the score, but the evaluator should also find that there is a significant positive correlation between the rise in the composite score and increase in the retention rate. While this hypothesis has not been directly validated, the conclusions of the school effectiveness literature tend to give weight to its face validity. It's a first step in studying the level of integration in a school environment and its impact on the dropout problem.

EXHIBIT 1

EVALUATION OF SCHOOL CLIMATE

Interaction Pair	Before Xs	X	f	fX	After Xs	X	f	fX
Teacher-Teacher								
Teacher-Student								
Student-Student								
Administrator-Teacher								
Administrator-Administrator								
Administrator-Student								
Counselor-Counselor								
Counselor-Student								
Counselor-Administrator								
Counselor-Teacher								
Community-Teacher								
Community-Student								
Community-Administrator								
Community-Counselor								
Parent-Teacher								
Parent-Student (in school context)								
Parent-Counselor								
Parent-Administrator								
Composite Score (FX)								

Composite Score = Index of Integration

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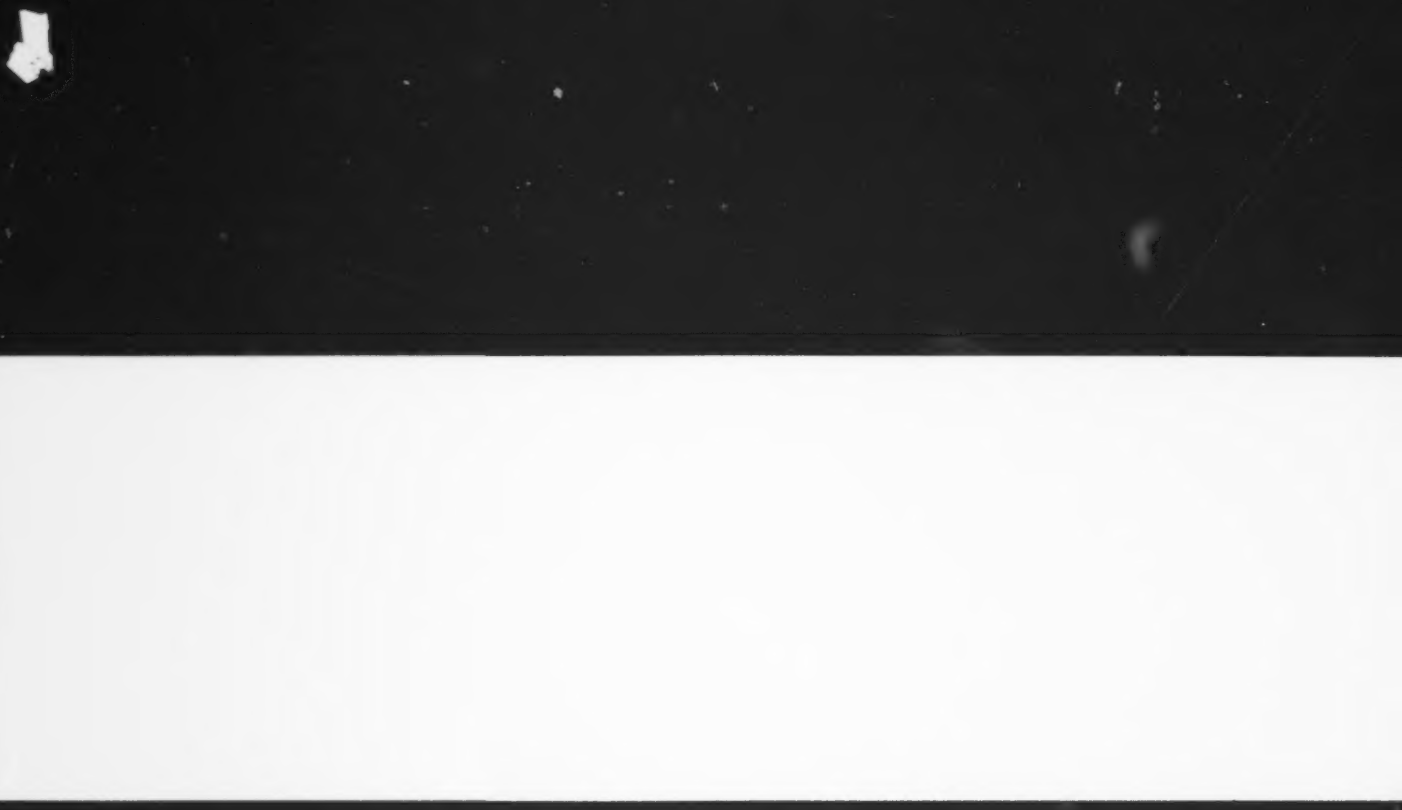

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